WRITINGS ON INDIA'S PARTITION

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—to the courage of the uprooted people.

Contents

Preface

The theme of this anthology has been with me since 1970, when I worked on the research project "India's Partition: Indian and Pakistani Literature", taken up by the Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo.

Recently, with the publication of some authentic historical records on India's political freedom and the accompanying partition of the country into India and Pakistan, the interest of the world community has been rekindled in this tragedy strewn historical event. There is yet much hidden behind the thick walls of secrecy. But whenever these facts are brought to the light of day, they will only tell more about the incidents and accidents, moves and counter-moves of the parties involved and the role played by the dominant personalities of the time in achieving freedom and in accepting dissection of the country. These records will remain mute on the sufferings and agonies of the people, who happened to be the real victims of the partition. A few glimpses of the blood-curdling experiences of the people have found a place in the writings of very few writers, whose works until now have been lying scattered. Dr. Narendrā Mohan, under the auspices of the Intercultural Research Institute, prepared in 1975 an anthology in Hindi "Sikka Badal Gaya", in which he collected for the first time some representative short stories from many Indian languages.

The present volume contains mainly short stories written on the theme of India's partition. The representative stories written in different major languages of India, are included here in their English translation. A few poems of Amrita Pritam have been included in recognition of their depth and sensibility and the one act play of Chandragupta Vidyalankar has been included to represent another genre of literature.

The creative writings have been put between the critical appreciation of two novels: Yashpal's Jhootha-Sach in the beginning and Khushwant Singh's Train To Pakistan at the end.

I express my feelings of indebtedness to Mrs. Takako Tanimoto, D.H.L., President of the Kansai University of Foreign Studies, and Professor Haruo Kozu, Director of the

Intercultural Research Institute, Japan for including this book in the Monograph Series of the institute.

I am thankful to Mr. Mahendra Kulasrestha for his cooperation in India and for procuring necessary permission from the authors. I feel obliged to the authors—individually and collectively—for their interest in the project and their contributions. I am also grateful to Mrs. Lila Ray, Mr. Jai Ratan, Mrs. Saroj Vashistha and Mr. K.S. Mathur for their pains in translating the works well within the schedule of the project.

Ms. Deborah Erickson has read a part of the manuscript and has assisted me in editing the language, for which she deserves my commendation.

My wife Neeta has helped me by translating a story and a play in just two days time and by offering constructive suggestions. Her fastidiousness with quality has I hope, in some measure been incorporated into the book.

I wish to express my obligation and appreciation for the fine work done by the printers and for the graceful cooperation extended to me by the publishers. Moreover, I am thankful to all those who have been instrumental in one way or another in bringing out this anthology.

I hope, the volume will be received well by those who are interested in the human aspect of the partition as told in the simple stories of the innocent people, who had to pass through the conflagration of communal hate, terror and massacre. For this, I feel grateful to the writers' moments of inspiration when these writings were born.

August 5, 1976.
Hirakata City
Japan

R.M.

A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF JHOOTHAA-SACH

A Novel By Yashpal

—Ramesh Mathur

Introduction

August 15, 1947 is a historically compounded date in the annals of Indian history. On this day, India and Pakistan, two independent nations were born, when an ancient country was divided into three pieces, forming two political units on the Indian sub-continent. This catastrophic partition of India was the culmination of a thousand year old love-hate relationship between the Hindus and Muslims and as far as India was concerned it was the beginning of a portentous future. More or less the British rulers were equally unjust to these new born sovereign states. They had left about 550 princely states free, within an independent country, i.e., India, a divided country from its very birth and; Pakistan whose two parts were separated by a thousand mile long alien land. Whereas, India could successfully prevail upon the princes in making their states an integral part of the country; Pakistan failed in keeping her hold on the Eastern part and circumstances helped in creating a third country—Bangladesh—on the sub-continent.

The attitude of the two major communities—Hindus and Muslims—towards their newly earned political freedom was very significant. To the Hindus, it was not freedom from the ninety year old British rule but it was salvation from the subjugation and slavery of more than a thousand years. On the other hand, the Muslims were rejoicing on the creation of a separate state exclusively for themselves and on the re-establishment of their rule, if not throughout all of India at least in a good part of it. This difference in attitude was natural. Muslims, though majority of them belonged to the same ethnic group as

the Hindus, always associated themselves with the Arab, Turk, Lodi and Mughal rulers of India, who one after the other invaded India from the early eigth century A.D. and ruled upto the mid-nineteenth century A.D., when the British Parliament effectively established its political control over India. The majority of Muslims could not reconcile themselves to this situation and remained hostile to the British and in turn a suspect in the eyes of the new rulers. Hindus welcomed this change of masters and took full advantage of this contact with the Western civilization and made fast advancement in the fields of education, trade and administration. At the same time, the enlightened Hindus re-interpreted the cultural heritage of their ancient civilization and aroused a new awakening in the Hindu people. The hundred years from the second half of the eighteenth through the first half of the nineteenth century was a period of Hindu renaissance and fervent activity in every field of Indian life.

Muslim Separatism

In spite of the fact that the incompatibility of the two communities was widely recognized from the earliest period of their contact, there were attempts by fair and even-minded people belonging to these communities to bring the two communities socially closer. The devotional movements and the Mughal Emperor Akbar's social, political and religious policies were part of such efforts in the medieval period. The work of many nationalist Muslims, fully coordinating with the zealous endeavor of Mahatma Gandhi for creating an ever lasting unity between the Hindus and Muslims is a part of the recent effort. Why these good-intentioned efforts failed, resulting in partition of the country on the communal basis, still remains an absorbing question with historians.

Muslims, as the ruling community, initially had no option than to keep their cultural identity unsoiled by Western influence. Their cultural and physical resistance to the impact of Western life-style, values and education systems, impaired their development as a modern community. And in due course they became socially and politically backward and ill-prepared to share the administrative responsibilities with the majority community of

Hindus. Among the early Muslim leaders, who saw the dismal plight of the Muslims, was Syed Ahmad Khan. Though denounced by his own community for his liberal and progressive views, he found it imperative that the Muslims must accept modern and scientific education, not only to compete with the Hindus, but also to come out of their insular and dogmatic world. The interest and welfare of his community remained of paramount importance with him.

Even before the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, like a visionary he could perceive very clearly that Muslim interests by cooperating with the majority community would not bode good because they had no homogeneity. They were rather incompatible, having basic differences in religion, social organization, historical traditions, composite cultural values, customs, sources of inspiration and aspirations.

This Muslim separatism or exclusiveness was a hard reality and ran contrary to the "live and let live" attitude of the Hindu leaders. This concept was propogated forcefully by every Muslim leader and took firmer roots as the political consciousness in the country increased and finally turned into the demand for a separate country for the Muslims. Though the path to realize this objective was tortuous, the twists and turns of political events largely helped the Muslims to achieve their goal.

The Political Process

The foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was a manifestation of political consciousness of the Indian people, but the struggle for freedom got its momentum when Lord Curzon's proposal of Bengal's partition in 1905 on the basis of Muslim majority and Muslim culture, was accepted by the British Parliament. The whole situation was reversed in 1911 because of the vehement opposition it faced from the Indian people in general and the Bengali people in particular. Even Rabindra Nath Tagore composed patriotic and nationalistic poems to oppose it and to inspire the people to fight against this partition. But the period between 1905 and 1947 and the events which took place during this span of time, brought us to the reality of the larger and devastating partition of the whole, united India in 1947.

Finding the interests of the Muslim community unsafe in the hands of the majority community, the All India Muslim League was established in 1906 to safeguard the political rights of the Muslims. In response to the demands of the Muslim League, separate communal representation in the legislative councils was granted under the Morley Minto Reforms of 1909. The leaders of the Muslim community were very candid in their representation to the British rulers by stating distinctly that the Muslims were a nation and the two communities were totally different. They had nothing in common in their traditional, religious, political and social conceptions.

Both, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, as well as the Hindu and Muslim communities, had moderates and extremists in their rank and file. Moderates were for strong Hindu-Muslim unity and communal harmony but extremists had mutual suspicion and distrust. There was a brief interlude of communal harmony when in 1916 these two political organizations reached an agreement regarding future plans for constitutional reforms in India and under the new leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress lent its support to the Khilafat Movement in 1919. But this amity did not last long. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms for the legislative assembly of 1921 gave a death blow to this fragile communal accord. Thereafter began a period of self-assertion and exertion to maximum political advantage of the situation which subsequently, erupted in a chain of vicious communal riots in many cities of South and North India. Leaders of the Congress party tried in vain to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding, trust, unity and harmony, between the two communities. A prominent factor in their failure was the sense of realism and political astuteness of the Muslim League leaders. They could realize more succinctly than ever that to establish a separate entity of the Mslims would be more advantageous to the interests of the Muslims than a merged entity with the Hindus. Due to the stand they took from the very beginning, their assumption was not wide off the mark when Pakistan came into existence in 1947, though other factors such as the political exploitation of the situation and events, by an alien government and diplomatic devices to bifurcate the country played an equally important part.

British Government in India under political pressure was

gradually expanding the scope for self-rule by transferring more and more responsibility and power to the Indian people. In 1927, the Simon Commission was appointed to study and recommend constitutional reforms for the working of the government of India. An All Parties Conference was held in 1928 to draft an agreed charter of demands for constitutional changes but no solution, acceptable to both the communities could be envisaged and the Congress submitted its own proposals to the government. These were not acceptable to the Government of India and the Congress found in this failure a legitimate ground to launch a campaign against the government. Jawahar Lal Nehru was elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1929 and under his youthful, imaginative and forceful leadership the resolution for complete independence for India was adopted. This set the Congress' objective in a definite direction with a clear perspective. Gradually political agitation became a mass civil disobedience movement. The Three Round table Conferences were held (1931-1932) in London with no gains to the Congress, because of its non-cooperative approach. Communal discord was erupting in riots. The provincial assembly elections of 1937 and unexpected successes of the Congress in these elections further damaged the relations between Hindus and Muslims, as Congress did not seek any cooperation with non-Congress Muslims. At the out break of World War II the Congress ministries resigned. With the adoption of a resolution for an independent separate nation for Muslims at the Lahore session of the Muslim League in 1940, the alienation of the two communities and two organizations was complete. Muslim League's stand got a favorable response from the Government of India. On August 8, 1942, Congress passed the "Quit India" resolution, which led to the sweeping arrests of the Congress leaders, keeping them behind bars until the end of the World War II.

The long political strife and struggle for freedom in India, the war-worn internal situation of the British Government, the apprehension of an out break of mutiny in the Indian Army and the statesmanship of the then Labour Government leaders led British Parliament to decide for a peaceful and constitutional transfer of power to the Indians themselves. An Interim Government, with the Congress and Muslim League as major parties, was installed in 1946, but could not function smoothly

because of the divergent interests and motives and, aims and objectives of the constituents. Ultimately, it broke down and the country's partition was accepted by the Congress leaders, may be in sheer disgust. This interim period was a crucial one. Leaders failed miserably in foreseeing the trends and evaluate the consequences, which might have followed their decisions, hence they could not conceive of any contingent plans to face and check the onslaught of coming events, which were staring them in their face. If this period could have been used for a peaceful, planned and rapid population exchange and a methodical rehabilitation, as was suggested by the Muslim League leaders and also by a few farsighted Congress leaders, then the human massacre of 1947 on the Indian soil could have been averted. In terms of humanism and what leaders owe to the followers as their moral obligation, it was a political crime.

Whereas Muslim leaders had been able to visualize since the last quarter of the nineteenth century the cultural incompatibility of the Hindus and Muslims and where their real interests lie, the Congress leadership practically refused to accept this contention and tried till the very end for communal harmony and unity. Jawahar Lal Nehru abhorred the very idea of communalism of any kind and complexion. It was to him an unbelievable anachronism. He refused to recognize the communal problem as such and understood it only in terms of economic disparity and always gave second priority to it, giving first priority to the fight for complete independence of the country. Throughout the freedom struggle and the long period of his political leadership Mahatma Gandhi emphasized on Hindu-Muslim unity as one of his life missions, standing parallel to his dedication to the cause of upliftment of the poor and untouchables and the attainment of freedom through non-violent means of the country. In the end, the secular and humanistic ideals of the Congress leaders failed. They had to accept the partition of the country realizing its basis and unavoidability. But they could not reconcile themselves to the concept of the Two-nations-theory, on the basis of two religions and two communities. This wrong assessment of the political reality and the Utopian approach for Hindu-Muslim unity, resulted in unprecedented blood-shed and a mass exodus. At the same time, Congress leaders were left with no ground to oppose the divi-

sion of the country, in spite of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi declared that the Pakistan will be created on his bones. On the other side, the Hindu traditionalists were too weak for mobilising any kind of effective opposition to this historical inevitability.

Such was the political situation, when events followed in quick succession and the long drawn out non-violent freedom struggle ended in violence. Freedom was finally attained but with no sense of achievement. On this eventful chapter of the Indian history vast literature has been written in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Sindhi and in other Indian languages.

LITERATURE: Thematic Pattern

Surprisingly, the literature of Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu languages is confined to the pre-and post-partition events which took place in the Punjab only and the Bengali literature has covered the happenings of Bengal. A survey of the available literature brings forward a fact that leaving exceptions, no Hindi writer of some standing from that period has contributed any serious work on this theme. A few notable short stories have of course been written and some novels have seen the light of day, long after the partition. Bengali literature is quite rich in quantity and almost all the contemporary writers have written on the partition and its aftereffects. Urdu and Punjabi writers have enriched their literature to a very great extent in the field of novels, stories and poetry.

A wide range of topics and problems pertaining to partition and its aftermath have been covered in this literature. But the most predominant theme running through the whole literature is the restoration of humanism and propogation of communal harmony between the two communities. Communal narrow-mindedness and religious fanatacism are deplored. There is vivid description and depiction of the evil consequences coming out of religious madness and intolerance. It has been shown that the human values are preserved by the individuals of both communities during the period of conflicts and clashes but these very values were the first in the casualty list, when it came to the interest of the two communities. Besides these main problems, other topics such as, communal riots, refugees: their

miseries, rehabilitation, camp-life, conversion, raping and kid-napping of women, recovering of Hindu women and their rehabilitation, land and property exchange, psychological sufferings of individuals and families, etc., are also covered in these writings.

Evaluation

The historical background and the basic realities of the Hindu-Muslim relations were ignored by the political leaders and were overlooked by most of the writers. It is difficult to find out whether this heap of literature covers all the aspects connected with the politics, society, religion, family and individual of India, or whether any attempt has been made by any author to go deep into the day-to-day happenings and the motivations of the political, social and religious leaders of that period. Considering the magnitude and serious nature of the topic, I found this literature inadequate and wanting. Most of the writers have treated the result and have narrated the consequences, without trying to fathom the cause or source, hence a very idealistic and artificial attitude of the writers has been reflected in their works. It appears to be notional, dogmatic, imaginary and reformist.

The massacre, rape, terror, arson, orgy, rioting, hostility, distrust, religious enmity, attacks and counter-attacks, etc., have found their due place in this literature, but the effects and the permanent scars and imprints which have been left on the human mind and life are conspicuously absent. What strains and psychological changes these incidents and accidents have brought in on the people of the Punjab, Bengal and Sindh, have not been depicted fully in these works. The humiliation, agony and despair of an individual and the complexities of the human values at such an abnormal time, have not found their proper place. Rehabilitation of the uprooted humanity was the biggest problem after the partition, but the way people of the Punjab settled down and their zeal, courage, hardwork and patience of this period have not got due recognition. It was a remarkable achievement and acquaints us with the traditional tolerance and forebearance of the Indian people, which in turn is an asset of the whole humanity.

Out of the vast available literature, I have chosen the most representative and voluminous Hindi novel "Jhoothaa-Sach" (False-truth) by Yashpal for a critical appreciation. It was published in 1957 in two volumes consisting of some 1196 pages. The story of the novel roughly covers the period between 1933 and 1957. The whole plot is based on an urban middle-class family of Lahore.

The Story

In the inimical environment of Lahore, there lived in a lane 'Bhola Pandhe', many middle-class families. Ram Lubhaya, a teacher by profession, occupied a rented house in the same locality. Being a reformist he believed in providing his children with the best education in spite of impecuniosity. His eldest son Jaidev Puri, who had a keen interest in politics had also a flair for writing. His younger sister Tara was beautiful and intelligent, but unlike her brother was more sedate. Among others lived in the vicinity were Ram Jwaya, elder brother of Ram Lubhaya and his two children: Kishori Lal and Sheelo. Ram Jwaya was a parcel clerk with the railways and over the years had become affluent through subornation. Sheelo who was in love with Ratan, had to comply with her father's wish to marry Mohan Lal.

In the course of time Jaidev was arrested for his political activities. During his absence from home, Tara was betrothed to one Somraj Sahaney. On his release Jaidev tried to avert this marriage for he did not consider Somraj a suitable match and instead encouraged Tara to continue with her education. Her college brought her in close association with a progressive group of students which led to a radical change in her attitude towards the middle-class way of life and values. While working for the student federation she became intimate with Asad, a co-worker. They were both impressed by each other's personality and their growing fondness drew them closer. Jaidev, who was very anxious about his sister's education did not hesitate to seek financial help from Professor Prannath. And to help his family out of the woods, he started private tutoring Urmila, the coquettish daughter of Lala Badhawamal Narang. The Narang family moved to Murrey for two months and Jaidev was asked

to accompany them. Urmila took more interest in her teacher than her studies and Jaidev too was a little enamoured by her youth and charm. Mrs. Narang who was well acquainted with her daughter's nature, paid Jaidev two month's tuition fee in advance and within a fortnight Jaidev was back in Lahore.

On his return to Lahore, Jaidev ran into the family of Pandit Girdhari Lal an old revolutionist who enjoyed an honorable position in society. His family which consisted of his wife and three daughters was to a considerable extent emancipated and characterized by erudition. His eldest daughter Kanta was married to Mahendra Naiyar, a lawyer. They lived in Model Town, one of the respectable areas of Lahore. Jaidev who continued with his writing and work with the newspaper 'Pairokar', began to tutor Kanak, the second daughter of Girdharilal.

Meanwhile the political situation of the country was undergoing a rapid change. The demand for partition and the creation of Pakistan was gaining ground. The Unionist Ministry in the Punjab had resigned. The blaze of communalism took a turn for the worse, affecting a large number of cities. Jaidev's article in Pairokar in which he accused both the Congress and Muslim League for the impaired relations between Hindus and Muslims, eventually led to the loss of his job.

His visits to Kanak's place had become infrequent due to the inferiority complex which Jaidev developed because of his joblessness and Naiyar's disregard for him. Incessant riots were threatening the security of the people and so Jaidev did not oppose Tara's marriage as strongly as before. In spite of the pressure for marriage and a lack of support from Jaidev, Tara expressed her unwillingness to get married. Meanwhile riots broke out in the neighbourhood and even their house did not remain unscathed. The news of this attack prompted Kanak to pay Jaidev a visit, and once again they became closer. Pandit Girdharilal who was well aware of his daughter's inclination towards Jaidev, very deftly advanced him a hundred rupees as remuneration to translate his novel. On completing the work Jaidev visited Girdharilal who showed great appreciation for his effort. In the course of the conversation he also indicated that he should treat Kanak as his younger sister and must rid himself of the idea of marrying her because of the difference in their social status and financial conditions.

As Tara's marriage date was drawing closer, she decided to meet Asad with the help of her friend Surendra. She wanted to know Asad's final decision. He refeused to marry her because of the existing situation in the country moreover it was against the rules of the Communist party. Jaidev has seen them meet, and on returning home had a tiff with his sister since he did not approve of his sister marrying a communist and that too a Muslim. The acceptance of the demand for the creation of Pakistan by the Congress gave a new lease to communal riots. Shahalmi was set on fire. Jaidev who had gone with a few of his Hindu friends to extinguish the fire was arrested on the spot. Kanak visited him while he was in police custody and sought the help of Naiyar to get him released. To show his gratitude. Jaidev visited Kanak, but save for Naiyar nobody else in their household greeted him.

Tara finally married Somraj Sahaney on the 27th of July. Prannath had come with a gift. On the wedding night Somraj affronted Tara by abusing her as being depraved. Incidentally, that very night, some Muslims broke into their compound, killing ensued and the place was set on fire. Tara however, managed to escape, but she was declared killed in the fire by her in-laws. During her flight she sprained one of her ankles and fell into the hands of a Muslim vagabond, who forcibly took her to his home. He spent the night with her, but the next morning she was deposited by the lady of the house and some women of the neighbourhood to the house of Hafizji. Hafizji read the Koran to her, explained the basic principles of Islam and requested her to convert to Islam, but it was to no avail.

Naiyar left for Nainital with Kanta, Kanak and Kanchan. His social life had brought him close to many political leaders and well-known personalities of the time. Kanak wanted to break away from this humdrum life, and to become self-supporting. She requested Jaidev to join her. Despondent with Tara's marriage and supposed death, Jaidev immediately went to Nainital to seek a new life. The two decided to leave for Lucknow on the 15th of August in search of a job. There they met Mr. Awasthi, but in vain, for Mr. Awasthi seemed more interested in Kanak than in Jaidev.

There was rejoicing for gaining freedom in India and celebrations for the creation of a Muslim state in Pakistan, but

there was no end to the miseries of those who were uprooted. Jaidev left for Lahore on August 20 to help his parents out of the turmoil. He found himself in a train which was packed with terrified Muslims, all bound for Lahore. The train was attacked near Sarhind, and more than half of the passengers were victims of the general massacre. He could not proceed beyond Ludhiana because the train was halted there and the Muslims were transported to refugee camps. For some time Jaivev drifted about with his bedding. Soon he was robbed of his belongings and was obliged to take shelter in a free kitchen for refugees.

Tara's refusal to accept Islam had set Hafizji and his family against her. Hafizji's son deceptively handed her over to a bunch of hoodlums who kept her in a hide-out together with other abducted Hindu women. A week later, they were rescued by a joint battalion of Indian and Pakistani army and taken to a Hindu camp. Asad was accompanying this battalion and he requested Tara to become a convert and live with him in Pakistan. But as the luck would have it, before they could meet again and decide, the group of abducted women was transported across to India.

Jaidev arrived in Jullundur and found employment in a hotel. One day he ran into Soodji, a prominent Congress worker and lawyer by profession. He sought his help to locate his separated family but since he was unsuccessful, Soodji put him in charge of a printing press which was previously owned by a Muslim. Presently, he met Lala Badhawamal Narang and his family in the market one day and asked them to come over to live with him. Badhawamal was in search of a job and left for Delhi with his eldest son leaving the others in Jaidev's care. Urmila had become a widow and was in need of a prop, and so Jaidev encouraged her to take up a job. When his letter addressed to Kanak in Nainital, returned, he became all the more dejected and uncertain of his future. In such a mental state he was drawn towards Urmila, who in turn saw in it a new future for herself. Urmila's mother comprehended the situation and left for Delhi.

Pandit Girdharilal had settled down with his family in Delhi, in a house that he had purchased recently. Kanak who had been working for a newspaper, had to leave it on account of ideological differences and undersirable working conditions.

Her search for a job brought her to Lucknow again where she met Mr. Awasthi. He arranged a job for her but wanted a price in return. However, she was saved from this situation by Girija Bhabhi, a Congress worker. Her work brought her in close association with Gill, a Communist party worker from the Punjab. Their growing friendship helped in a big way to wipe out their solitude. Mahendra Naiyar had established his practice in Jullundur. Through her correspondence with Naiyar, Kanak came to know about Jaidev's where abouts, and soon left for Jullundur. On her arrival, to her chagrin found Jaidev living with Urmila. The situation was soon clarified by Jaidev, and the sudden appearance of Soodji on the scene, worked like an anchor to find her a permanent place in the household of Jaidev. Urmila on the advice of Soodji, sought admission in a hospital to study nursing. Though she was pregnant, she left the house without uttering a single word.

Women restored from Sekhupura were brought to Amritsar. Banti implored Tara to help her find her family. They came to Delhi, where they found shelter in a refugee camp. After a long day's search, Banti finally spots her son in Paharganj and hugs him, but her family refused to accept her. They slammed the door in her face. She died on the door step beating her head against it. Only then did the family members accept her and cremate her. After staying out the whole night, Tara returned to the camp. The inmates ridiculed her but Dr. Shyama the camp authority who understood her predicament, sought her help in the camp work. Mr. Prasad a camp officer tried to take advantage of her situation so she started looking for a job elsewhere. At last she was lucky enough to get the offer of a job as a governess, with a family named Agarwala. Agarwala's residence happened to be a meeting place of Congress leaders and high government officials. By the dint of her hard work, she managed to carve out a place for herself in the family. Narottam, the son of Mr. Agarwala's first wife, who had just returned from England was also very impressed and charmed by her gentle temperament and competence. Tara's increasing popularity with the visitors made Mrs. Agarwala very jealous. Narottam, who was aware of this growing bitterness between his step-mother and Tara, soon found a government job for her by the good offices of Mr. Rawat, the Home Secretary and

arranged for her stay with Miss Mercy. One day while working with the Ministry of Rehabilitation, she came across the address of Mohan Lal, Sheelo's husband. She called on Sheelo in Shaktinagar and was amazed to see her living under such miserable conditions. The cause of the rift between Sheelo and her husband was her son, Gulloo who was actually the son of her lover, Ratan. Tara rescued Sheelo with the help of Ratan and thereafter Ratan lived with Sheelo and their son happily.

Jaidev married Kanak and after their marriage, they brought out a weekly journal 'Nazir'. Under the able guidance of Soodji, Jaidev had made a place for himself in the field of politics. His increasing work load prompted him to send for Gill from Lucknow. Govind Ram, Ratan's father informed Jaidev that Tara was still alive, but Jaidev refrained from telling this to his parents since he apprehended trouble. Kanak was surprised at her husband's indifference towards his sister. Meanwhile, Mohan Lal complained to Ram Jwaya that Tara had taken away Sheelo from him and since then there had been no trace of her. Jaidev became critical of his sister's action and sent Kanak to Delhi to meet her. After meeting Tara, Kanak became suspicious of Jaidev's intentions.

Jaidev was elected to the state assembly. His each success in the field of politics was making him more remote from his ideals and truth. Soodji did not approve of Kanak's article on land distribution which she had published in 'Nazir'. The gulf between Kanak and Jaidev was widening. He ignored her and did not hesitate to insult her in public. This affected their conjugal life to such an extent that she left him and went with her daughter, Jaya to join her father in Delhi.

In the meantime Mercy got married and Tara had to live separately with a widow and her daughter, Seeta. One day in the hope of getting a government loan, Somraj Sahaney came to Tara's office with some forged documents and high recommendations. Both were confounded and out of wits. She paid no heed to the recommendations and refused to grant him the loan. In due course she met Dr. Prannath in connection with her office work. Her friends and well wishers insisted on her getting married and one day Dr. Prannath came forward with his proposal. She informed him about an illness she had con-

tacted and expressed her helplessness. Despite this he married her and took her abroad for treatment of the illness.

It was almost two years since Kanak had left Jullundur. Jaidev was prepared for a compromise but Kanak was not. Her father was sad yet he advised her to seek a legal divorce. Kanak and Jaidev met at Naiyar's place, but their meeting was futile. Soodji, Jaidev and Somraj conspired and arranged for a government action against Prannath and Tara on the charge "How could Dr. Prannath marry a married woman?" With the help of Gill and Naiyar and by the intervention of the Prime Minister, both were declared innocent. The story comes to an end with the defeat of Soodji in the latest elections.

Criticism

The main theme of the novel is interspersed with many incidental and secondary stories. The life course of the main and supporting characters of the novel passes through the domestic, social, religious, economical, political, interpersonal and intrapersonal problems and complications. Sometimes it seems that their life is submerging deep into the slush of problems, in the creation of which none of the characters have been instrumental. The characters of "Jhootha-Sach", are as if inundated with problems and ever-changing situations which are dealt with by them in a matter-of-fact manner leaving hardly or any impression on them.

Written against the backdrop of India's partition, the novel portrays a lively word-sketch of the pre-partition Punjab, especially of the middle class Hindu society living in Lahore. The novel projects a distinct picture of the political situation prevalent at that time, as well as depicts the ambiguity, confusion and dilemma in the minds of the people of Lahore regarding the import and consequences of the partition. But the genesis of India's partition and the question of country's partition have not been duly emphasized. Partition, as a historical event has been described in the first volume of the novel which has been subtitled "Vatan Aur Desh", literally meaning "Country and Country", 'Vatan' referring to the country of Muslims and 'Desh' to the country of Hindus. It could also be interpreted as United India belonging to both Muslims and

Hindus. It is worth noting that the subtitle of the second volume of the novel is 'Desh Ka Bhavishya' i.e., the future of the country, which deals with post-partition India only, not Pakistan.

Bhola Pandhey's lane, the locale of the first part of the novel takes a shape of a stage where the real life-drama of the middle-class section of the Indian society is enacted. The families living in this lane are bearers of middle-class conventions, customs and narrow views on life, and they are a people who cling to the form at the cost of the content. Poverty is the cancer of this class and the root of all its complexities. The novel begins with the death of Ram Lubhaya's mother, putting him face to face with the problem of performing the last rites and other ceremonies connected with the period of mourning. Ram Lubhaya a reformist, wishes to discard all the traditional customs, but the ladies of the locality including his eldest daughter-in-law oppose him and elect to perform the necessary traditional rites and rituals. To follow the traditional way is the chief trait of the middle-class mentality. The intimacy of the author with such susceptibilities of the middle class has been unveiled in many of the episodes and events.

The relationship between the two brothers Ram Jwaya and Ram Lubhaya is a replica of the middle-class family structure. Ram Lubhaya out of sheer respect for his elder brother, obeys him regarding his children's education and marriage despite holding liberal and progressive views on such matters. His sense of obligation toward his elder brother totally eclipses his rational mind and against his own wishes he gives his educated daughter Tara in marriage to an uneducated widower Somraj Sahaney.

Jaidev Puri the hero of the novel suffering with acute inferiority complex is a product of such a middle-class. Though educated, active in politics, with a flair for writing and well-known in the city, could never cross with confidence the threshold of Kanak's house, who belonged to the elite class. His lack of confidence and innate inferiority complex invites a sarcastic remark from Mahendra, Kanak's brother-in-law that "he feels ill at ease and out of place in the company of elites." But as Kanak's father Girdharilal belongs to the elite society of Lahore Jaidev teaches Kanak not as a paid tutor but as a res-

pected family friend. By not charging any fee, he tries to convince himself that he has raised himself to the same standard as Girdharilal. This inferiority complex pervades his whole life, in spite of his gaining success in his profession and political career. Even Tara is not devoid of this complex for she confides only in Asad about her coaching privately the nephews of Dr. Prannath. Similarly, the visit of well-to-do Kanak and Prannath at her home embarrasses her and makes her conscious of her poverty. The complex of the middle-class is an inseparable part of its collective personality, but at the same time it is this very section of the society, which strives for the realization of the ideals. Jaidev, without compromising his stand point writes a critical article in 'Pairokar' and consequently loses his job. Even Tara and Kanak uphold the ideals and fight for their convictions and suffer.

In the context of social problems, the author has attacked the social and religious prejudices and predilections of the Hindu society which to a great extent seem to be justified. The communal problem of Hindus and Muslims from the political point of view and its off shoot the problem of the partition of the country have been dealt with at length. Tara and Jaidev never believed that communal problem exists between Hindus and Muslims. The communist party workers of the Punjab actively tried for Hindu-Muslim unity. Jaidev in one of his articles charges both Congress and Muslim League for their narrow outlook and communal policies. He persuades the people of his locality not to spread the virus of communalism. As an attempt to bring people of the two communities closer, the author has shown relationships between a Hindu girl and a Muslim boy (Tara and Asad) and vice versa, (Jubeda and Pradyumna). Strangely enough, the author has traced the origin of most of the communal riots which broke out in Lahore during the pre-partition period to Hindus. The writer seems to be extra cautious in dealing with the role of Muslims in the communal riots and the savagery that let loose after the partition, so that his impartiality and neutrality may not be doubted. It has been shown as though the Communist Party of India was the chief protagonist of Hindu-Muslim unity and the unity of India. The Communist workers help in restoring the abducted Hindu women after the partition and also in establishing peace and

communal amity in Lahore. It is probable that it may not be a historical fact but a fact in the novel due to the writers Marxist leanings.

The author attributes the existing communal animosity to the wrong policies pursued by the political leaders. He places the responsibility of the general massacre squarely on the leaders, who used people to achieve their own ends and finds the root of partition in the Hindus' belief in defilement and impurity. As Dr. Prannath puts it, "The seed of division of Hindus and Muslims into Hindustan and Pakistan was not sown on the day when the proportionate division of government services between Hindus and Mnslims was fixed or the proposal of separate electorate was implemented, but it was sown on the day when Muslims were considered alien and untouchables."

Although contemporary political situation and its gradual development has been described in the novel, there is hardly any mention of the stand points of the three parties, viz., the Congress, the Muslim League and the Government of India in connection with India's partition. When the Unionist Ministry of the Punjab resigned and the Congress and the League failed to form a new ministry, the Punjab was ruled directly by the British Governor of the state. Instead of putting an end to British rule, these two political parties became easy prey to the divide and rule policy of the British and to their mutual distrust and hostility. Probably underlining this point a bus driver commented that the country of the people has become the country of religions. Is not it true that these people were divided into two religions even prior to partition? Is not it worth considering that how far the attempts of Gandhi and Congress in a span of thirty years, were successful in bringing these two communities closer? Why their endeavors resulted in dismal failures? It will be wide off the mark if the British Government is solely blamed for this tragedy. It would not have been difficult to find out the historical, religious, political, social and practical reasons for this failure had the leaders not been blinded by their hollow idealism. Apart from the attitudes and activities of the political parties and their leaders, the question of Hindu-Muslim unity was worth considering theoretically. There was a need and there was ample scope for an honest and

objective deliberation on this problem, but the novel is deficient in this respect.

The immediate repercussions of partition were: general massacre, displacement of millions of people, inhuman atrocities on women and extensive loss of property. A large number of Hindus and Mulims were killed in the communal riots of Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab prior to partition, but after the partition a dreadful massacre ensued. People like Mahendra Naiyar who believed in the proclamation of the Congress and the League that the minorities in respective countries will enjoy equal civilian rights and privileges and will be free to pursue their religion and culture, were disillusioned. The caravans of Hindus and Muslims proceeding in opposite directions were soon on the roads. The refugees flowed into the cities of Amritsar, Ludhiana, Jullundur, Delhi etc., like a tidal bore. The Governments of the two newly born countries were seized with the problem of rehabilitating them. The refugees were so preoccupied in finding a niche for themselves that they could hardly mourn the deaths of their relatives. On reaching Jullundur, Jaidev Puri was fortunate to meet his old acquaintance Soodji. But he was so dismayed by the treatment the refugees received from the local people that he could but only think that the Hindus were earning merit by running free kitchens and at the same time trying to make profits out of their dealings with the refugees.

The treatment of female characters in 'Jhoothaa-Sach' is extremely humane. The restrictions put on girls in Indian families is evident from the characters of Tara, Sheelo and Urmila. After not receiving any support from her brother, Tara becomes helpless and against her wishes agrees to marry Somraj Sahaney who was not a suitable match for her. Aware of her unwillingness, Somraj misbehaves with her and mistreats her on the very first night of their marriage. Sheelo is in love with Ratan but because of social restrictions she had to marry Mohan Lal. Though Urmila is attracted towards Jaidev, she is still forced to marry another person. This tale of women's helplessness takes a new dimension in the context of events which took place at the time of partition. Keeping women above such categories and considerations as Hindu-Muslim, rich-poor, literate-illiterate, the author has successfully brought out the

inner personality of women. Some Muslim female characters of the novel are though religiously acrimonious still sympathize with the women in plight no matter to which religion the latter belong to. Women suffer from the atrocities of both love and hate. If beauty proves to be a curse so does ugliness. If restrictions bring distress, freedom becomes the cause of their unhappiness. Whether financially dependent or independent, the solution to women's problems is not there in either of the cases. Woman and her feminity has been raised to a high level of humanism, which appears to be the strongest point of the novel. The novel is peppered with instances of heartless treatment mete out to the rescued Hindu women. Nobody is willing to accept these ill-fated women, neither their in-laws nor their own parents. Chinti who had come to the refugee camp and who after being recognized by her parents, was not given shelter by them on the pretext they had married her, so it is now upto her in-laws to accept or reject her. One of the rescued women Banti, leaves for India from Lahore with the sole purpose of to find out her infant son. Finally she spots her son in Delhi, implores her in-laws to accept her where upon her father-in-law turns a deaf ear to her appeals and drives her out of the house. Completely heart-broken, Banti beats her head against the threshold of the house and puts an end to her life. A young couple who witnessed this sordid incident remarked, "Whatever has happened to we, Hindus, was not enough, this unjust community should have been wiped off from the earth."

Tara, after passing through an ignominious period of her life in Lahore comes to India as a rescued woman. While living in Delhi she never once considers it necessary to find her relatives because she is convinced she will not be accepted gracefully by them. Whenever, educated women like Tara, Kanak etc., have tried to be economically self-reliant, they have invariably run into hypocrites like Prasadji, Awasthi and Sinha who did not hesitate in taking advantage of the helplessness of such women. Circumstances made it convenient for Jaidev to live with the young widow Urmila. But when Kanak returned he finds himself in a scandalous situation, and drives pregnant Urmila out of his house. Such instances of injustice and pitiable condition of women by which Yashpal has tried to draw the

attention to the wretched position of women in Indian society can be cited from the novel. The most poignant comment on this situation alludes from Banti: "A man can kill another man and may cut him into pieces, but he will never disgrace him." The sorrowful life stories of Tara, Kanak, Urmila, Chinti and Banti are known, but there were many among the refugee women who's stories Yashpal has kept untold, as if an author of his stature and sensitivity finds it indescribable in language.

In the second volume of the novel the post-independent India's political, social and economic problems have been presented through the life sketches of Tara, Jaidev, Kanak and other characters. The problems such as the rehabilitation of refugees, Gandhi and Nehru's attempt to eradicate the growing communal animosity, the Congress rulers working as puppets of the capitalists, general moral degeneration of the Congress leaders, deteriorating standard of journalism, increasing nepotism and bribery in the country, etc., are dealt with. A lengthy though one-sided description of Gandhiji's fast and his assassination is also very engaging.

The social upheaval during the period between 1946-1957 has been depicted in the novel, but the approach of the novelist has been very equanimous. It appears that he has deliberately avoided the passionate issues of the time and even if he has raised any issue like communal riots, conversions, etc., it has been done with great strategem and caution. Spots reflecting humane qualities in men are very few but it is difficult to ascertain whether these are with an intention to attack Hindu traditional values or to portrait the human qualities. The tragedies of Banti, Chinti and Urmila have those potentialities which are capable of drawing on the sympathies of all people irrespective of their caste, creed and belief. Yashpal has very successfully hit on the most vulnerable point of the Hindu society by showing the most unsympathetic attitudes of the family members towards the victims of partition. The reunion of Sheelo and her son with Ratan and Dr. Prannath's proposal of marriage to Tara are the exceptions and could be understood from the level of humanism.

The paradoxical title 'Jhoothaa-Sach' especially refers to the marriage of Tara to Somraj. They are married it is true but in reality it is grossly fake or a false truth. It is not unlikely that the

title suggests the two sides of every character—one which is known to all but is not true and the other which is experienced by the character himself and is true. The former is the false truth and the latter the real truth.

TIME'S WOUND CRIES OUT IN ME

—Amrita Pritam

Amrita Pritam is perhaps the only Indian poet whose poems on the agony of India's partition created the greatest impact and moved the largest number of people. She writes in Punjabi and though she has a large number of short stories and over a dozen novels to her credit, she is essentially a poet. Presented here are some of her best poems on the theme of Partition. The one entitled 'Divided' appeared immediately after the partition of India, on Jan. 18, 1948, in the 'Civil and Military Gazette', Lahore. The last, 'To Waris Shah I Say', is classed among the finest pieces written on this theme and has been very popular. It invokes Waris Shah, who wrote the famous love-poem "Heer-Ranjha" and is regarded as the great poet of Punjab, loved equally by Hindus and Muslims.

Frenzy

When religion goes to people's heads
Steel is sharpened
Tongues grow cruel
Poisoned by black snakes of hatred,
Red blood in the veins
Turn dark
Lips beautiful to kiss
Foam.

The goddess of death
Comes by night
To drink blood from scattered skulls.

Beaks of vultures
Eat the flesh of dead and dying
And men's eyes cannot tell
Other women from their own.

Sheep of every flock
When they see a different fleece
Taking a scrap of flesh
Or a thread two yards long
Convert the stranger by force[1]
And drive it to join their own flock.

So they grow virtuous
They serve religion
They raise the flag.
In bright daylight
Or in pitch-dark night
Steel is sharpened

And innocent children
Delicate women
Strong young men
Are human beings no longer
But animals for sacrifice.
When religion goes to people's heads...

Translated by Charles Brasch

Divided

Beautiful neighbour!
With a pair of bullocks in front of your cart
You are driving away and away,
Leaving behind
On the body of our common motherland,
Two deep scars of the heavy wheels.

You are driving away and away
With your families,

1. A Hindu is converted to Islam by being forced to eat beef; a Muslim is converted to Hinduism by being forced to wear round his neck a thread two yards long.

And your bag and baggage,
Because our common motherland
Has been dissected.

'One,' they say, 'is Pakistan,'
'The other,' they tell us, 'is Hindustan.'

Beautiful neighbour!
The soil from which we cropped the grams,
Ears of maize and tender carrots
Both together,
But now the wheat from the same soil
Cannot be your food.
The springs and wells where we drank the water
Both together
Cannot now touch your lips,
Because my elders have named it Pakistan.

Beautiful neighbour!
You are going to Hindustan
But my feet cannot cross the boundary
Of this dissected piece of land.
The wheat of your country's soil
Cannot be my food;
I cannot drink the water of your wells
Because your elders have named it Hindustan.

Beautiful neighbour!
The Punjab was a single body,
The five rivers its blood-vessels,
And the overflowing waters of those rivers
The common blood.
Today that body has been torn apart—
How will the blood pass
Through the broken limbs!

Punjab is an ancient land
Older than History itself,

It was one even under foreign rule
But now when we will rule ourselves
It stands divided.

The skies under which
I played *kabaddi* with your brothers,
Joined the pageants with them,
Sang Heer-Ranjha,
Recited poems by Bulle Shah,
Hymns from Guru Nanak,
And listened to folk songs of Mirza-Sahiban,

And the compound where
You played pebbles with my sister,
Her right hand in your left
Her left hand in your right—
You swung your bodies together
So gracefully round and round,
The compound where
You spun the wheels together,
And with the rhythm of folk dance
Sang the songs of the common soil,
We cannot walk there any more.

The Scar of a Wound

When they forced my mother's womb
I came as every child must come:
I am the mark of that blow,
Violation made me grow:
In my country's agony
They seared my mother's brow with me
When they forced my mother's womb.

I am the curse of man today.
Time's wound cries out in me;
Sun and moon hid their light

And stars fell dead in thick night
When they forced my mother's womb.

I am the scar of that wound
That in my mother's body burned,
I am the shame she nursed within,
The stench and loathsomeness of man,
The sign of torment she must bear
As her body's lasting wear.

Strange fruit ripened on the tree
Of Independence—look and see!
When they forced my mother's womb.

Translated by Charles Brasch

To Waris Shah I Say

Speak from the depths of the grave,
to Waris Shah I say
and add a new page to your saga of love
today.

Once wept a daughter of Punjab
your pen unleashed a million cries,
a million daughters weep today,
to you Waris Shah they turn their eyes.

Awake, decry your Punjab,
O sufferer with those suffering!
Corpses entomb the fields today
the Chenab is flowing with blood.
Mingled with poison by some,
are the waters of five rivers,
and this torrent of pollution,
unceasingly covers our earth.
And heavy with venom were the winds,

that blew through the forests,
transmuting into a snake,
The reed of each musical branch.
With sting after sting did the serpents
suppress the voice of people.
A moment, so brief, and the limbs of Punjab
turned blue
Threads snapped from their shuttles
and rent the songs at the throat,
silenced was the spinning wheel's hum,
severed from their gatherings, the women.
Branches heavy with swings,
cracked from *peepul* trees,
boats laden with trappings,
loosened from anchors to sink.

Despoilers of beauty and love,
each man now turned a Kedu[1]
where can we seek for another like
Waris Shah today?

Only you can speak from the grave,
to Waris Shah I say
add another page to your epic of love
today.

1. Kedu was the uncle of Heer who did not let her meet her lover Ranjha.

SAA'DAT HASAN MANTO

Manto has written a large number of short stories on the theme of India's partition and most of these are deeply moving. There is a strange objectivity about them and an involvement so rare in other writers. He wrote in Urdu and shifted to Pakistan after partition, and died there in the worst of circumstances, in 1955, aged 40. Presented here are three of his best stories and a few pieces from the many entitled "Black Margins".

The Dog of Tithwal

On both the sides the soldiers were entrenched on their defence lines for the past many days. During the day gun shots were fired a number of times from both the sides. But along with these no human sound was heard. The weather was just beautiful. The breeze had mingled with the smell of the wild flowers. Nature, unaware of the war taking place in its hills and valleys, was busy with its daily routine. The birds were twittering as usual, the bees were flitting from one flower to the other lazily collecting the honey.

When the sound of the gun shots echoed in the hills, the startled birds started flying—as if someone had touched the wrong string of the instrument and their ears had been hurt. The end of September was romantically embracing the beginning of October. It looked as if the winters were making up with the summers. Light thin clouds like beaten up cotton were floating around on the blue sky as if they were travelling on their own white boats in a river.

The soldiers on both the sides had been feeling bored for many days. Why can't something decisive happen? Out of sheer boredom they started reciting poetry to each other. They spent their time lying on the earth littered with stones, and fired a couple of shots when ordered to.

Both the entrenchments were in a very protected and safe place. The gun shots came with full force, hit the stones and

died a natural death. Both the hills were equally high. In between lay a small green valley on whose chest a small rivulet lay like a fat snake.

There was no danger from aeroplanes because no one had any canons. Both the sides used to light a fire without any fear. The smoke would rise and mingle with the air. Due to the complete silence at night they could hear each others' laughter. Someone's singing would awake the stillness of the night. The echo of their voices sounded as if someone was repeating a lesson.

The round of tea was over. The light coal fire made from pine wood had nearly died. The sky was clear. The weather had a touch of coolness. The breeze was not carrying the fragrant odour of the flowers, as if they had closed their bottles of perfume, at night. But the perspiration of the resin of the pine trees could be smelt, though it was not an unpleasant smell. Everyone was sleeping in his blanket but in a manner as if they were ready to start fighting at a moment's notice. Jamadar Harnam Singh was on watch duty. At two o'clock he woke up Ganda Singh to take over. He wanted to sleep but the sleep was as far away from his eyes as the stars in the sky. Jamadar Harnam Singh was lying face up looking at the sky. He started singing:

I want to buy a shoe
Studded with silver stars,
Harnam Singh, my friend,
Even if you have to sell
Your buffalo

Harnam Singh felt as if the sky was littered with silver-studded shoes. He sang further:

I will buy a shoe
Studded with silver stars
For you, my woman,
Even if I have to sell
My buffalo

He smiled after he had finished the song. Realising that he will not be able to sleep any more he woke up everyone of his friends. The mention of woman in the song had excited his

feelings. He wanted to talk nonsense, something meaningless, anything at all, so that a feminine atmosphere could be created. They talked but it was all disjointed. The youngest among them, Banta Singh, had the best voice. He went and sat down at a distance. The others went on talking and yawning at the same time. A little later, Banta Singh started singing lines from 'Heer' in his deep sad voice:

Says Heer
The holy men tell lies,
No one cares for an angry lover,
I've failed to find anyone
Who could bring him back.
An eagle has snatched
The voice of a swan
And now he's telling tales
To those who're sad

After some time he sang the reply Ranjha had given to Heer:

Thank God
The eagle is now dead.
This recluse is in the same condition,
All his wealth has been destroyed,
All is lost—
The Prophet is my witness.
I've become a mendicant,
I wear sadness all about me
And Syed Waris has now become
Waris Shah

Banta Singh stopped singing just as suddenly as he had started. It appeared as if the brown hills had also worn a long sheet of sadness. Jamadar Harnam Singh swore at something imaginary and lay down. At the fag end of the sad night they heard a dog barking. They were all startled. The sound came from somewhere quite close to them. Jamadar Harnam Singh sat up and said, "Where has this barking dog come from?"

Now his barking had come closer. Moments later, the sound came from the bushes. Banta Singh went towards it. He returned with a stray dog whose tail was wagging. He

[1] 'Heer-Ranjha' is a famous love-tale of Punjab written by Waris Shah.

smiled and said, "Jamadar Saheb, I asked 'Who comes there' and he replied, 'I am Chapad Jhun-Jhun.'"

Everyone laughed at this naming of the dog. Jamadar Harnam Singh said, "All right, Chapad Jhun-Jhun, come here."

The dog, thinking that he had been given something to eat, went near him. Harnam Singh threw a biscuit towards him. Before the dog could pick it up he said, "Wait, are you a Pakistani? Show me your sign."

Everyone laughed. The dog started wagging his tail.

"This is no sign. All dogs do this," he commented.

Banta Singh held the trembling tail of the dog and said, "Poor thing, he seems to be a refugee."

Harnam Singh threw another biscuit towards the dog who ate it up. One of the soldiers, digging the earth with his shoes, said, "Now the dogs will also have to be either Hindustanis or Pakistanis."

Harnam Singh threw a few more biscuits towards the dog and said, "Like the Pakistanis their dogs will also be killed by our bullets."

"Long live Hindustan!" one of them shouted.

Hearing the slogan the dog stepped back without picking up the biscuits. He hid his tail between his legs. Harnam Singh laughed and said, "Why are you afraid of our slogan, Chapad Jhun-Jhun? Come, eat it out and have one more."

Soon it was morning. The sun was still undecided about rising when its rays suddenly spread all over the valley and soon it was daylight in the area called Tithwal.

Fighting in this area had been going on for a long time. For each hill dozens of soldiers were killed yet it always remained an indecisive seizure. Today they owned a particular hill, the next day Pakistan won it over.

Harnam Singh looked at the surroundings through his binoculars. Smoke was rising above the hill, which meant that tea was being prepared. Breakfast was being cooked on this side also. The fire had been lighted. The soldiers on the other side also must have noticed the smoke on this side.

During breakfast each one of them gave a share of his food to the dog. They were all showing their interest in the dog as

if they wanted to befriend him. All of them called him 'Chapad Jhun-Jhun'.

On the other side, in the evening, Subedar Himmat Khan of the Pakistani army was looking at the map of Tithwal. While doing so he was twisting his famous moustaches—there were many tales about these. Near him sat the wireless operator. He was receiving the orders from the platoon commander. At a little distance sat Bashir with his gun. He was singing softly:

My love
Where have you spent the night

Bashir seemed to be enjoying the song. As he raised his voice to sing louder, Himmat Khan's voice came loud and clear, "Where did you spend the night?"

Surprised, Bashir looked at Himmat Khan but realised that he was talking to someone else.

"Tell me."

Bashir saw the stray dog who had come to live with them a few days ago as an uninvited guest. Bashir addressed the dog with the song:

Where have you spent the night
My love

The dog started wagging his tail, sweeping the earth with it. Subedar Himmat Khan said, "This dog does nothing but wag his tail."

Bashir noticed his neck and said, "There is something tied to his neck."

But before he could reach the dog another soldier removed the string from his neck. To the string was tied a piece of cardboard with something written on it.

Subedar Himmat Khan took the cardboard piece and said, "Well, something is written on this. Can anyone read?"

Bashir stepped forward, took the piece, and said, "Yes, I can read a little."...With great difficulty, he read the words, "Ch...a...pad...Jhun...Jhun!...What does that mean?"

Subedar Himmat Khan twisted his moustaches and said, "Must be a code-word...Anything else, Bashir?"

"Yes...this...is...a...Hin...Hindustani...dog."

"But what does it mean? What did you read...Chapad...?"
"Chapad Jhun-Jhun..."

One soldier, trying to show his intelligence, said, "Some secret lies in this word."

"Yes, it looks like that," agreed Himmat Khan.

Bashir read the complete text once again, "Chapad Jhun-Jhun. This is a Hindustani dog."

Subedar Himmat Khan fixed the head-phone and spoke to his platoon commander over the wireless about the dog. He told him how the dog had arrived many days ago, stayed with them, and suddenly disappeared one day. How he was missing for the whole night. Now he had returned with a string and a piece of cardboard around his neck. He read out the text three times to the commander. But they failed to find out its meaning.

Meanwhile Bashir kept petting the dog, asking him about his whereabouts last night. He never got a satisfactory answer, all the dog did was wag his tail. This annoyed Bashir. He shook the tail and the dog started whining.

Himmat Khan looked at the map for a while and then stood up decisively. He picked up a cigarette packet, opened it and gave it to Bashir, "Here, Bashir, write down on it in Gurmukhi ...for those worms..."

Bashir tore the cover of the packet and asked, "What should I write, Subedar Sahib?"

Himmat Khan twisted his moustache and started thinking aloud. "Write...just write..." Saying this he gave the pencil to Bashir as if he was asking, 'What should be written?'

Bashir, with the pencil tip fixed on his nose, said, "How about Sapad Sun-Sun?"

Himmat Khan was satisfied at once. "The answer to Chapad Jhun-Jhun can only be Sapad Sun-Sun—what else! These Sikhs will be taught a good lesson...sons of their mothers!"

Bashir wrote: "Sapad Sun-Sun."

"Hundred per cent correct. Write Sapad...Sun...Sun..." The Subedar laughed heartily. "And now add: This is a Pakistani dog."

Himmat Khan took the cardboard piece from Bashir, made a hole in a corner with pencil, put a string through it, and

stretched his hand towards the dog: "Now take it away to your offsprings."

Everyone laughed aloud. Himmat Khan tied the string around the dog's neck and advised him, "Look here, friend, don't be a traitor; you know the punishment for being a traitor is death."

The dog kept wagging his tail and eating what was given to him. After he had finished eating Himmat Khan held the string, turned him towards the narrow path and said, "Go, deliver this letter to the enemies...but don't forget to return. This is my order to you. Understand?"

The dog started moving slowly on the narrow path. Subedar Himmat Khan fired a gun shot.

The shot and its echo was heard by the Hindustanis on the other side. They tried to find out what it was about but could not do so. Jamadar Harnam Singh was already irritated, this sound made him more so.

He ordered firing. For half an hour gun shots were fired from his side. Then bored of this, Harnam Singh ordered his soldiers to stop firing. He started combing his beard. He fixed his hair with the help of a net and asked, "Hey Banta Singh, where is Chapad Jhun-Jhun?"

Banta Singh, who was removing the resin from the dried pine wood with his nails, replied, "I don't know."

"The dog could not digest all that *ghee*," said Harnam Singh.

Banta Singh didn't understand the meaning of this simple idiom. "We never gave him anything cooked in *ghee*."

Harnam Singh laughed and said, "You illiterate soul! Talking to you is like losing hundred rupees."

Suddenly the soldier on watch duty yelled out, "He is coming."

Everyone was startled. "Who?" asked Harnam Singh.

"What was his name...Chapad Jhun-Jhun."

"Chapad Jhun-Jhun. What is he doing?" asked Harnam Singh,

"He is coming," said the soldier. Jamadar Harnam Singh took the binoculars and started looking towards the hill atten-

tively. "He is coming towards us...the string is around his neck. But he is coming from the enemy side."

Saying this Harnam Singh swore at the dog's mother. He picked up his gun and fired at the dog. He missed the shot. The bullet hit the ground and was buried in the earth. The dog was frightened. He stopped.

From the other side Subedar Himmat Khan saw through his binoculars: the dog was standing on the narrow path.

One more shot was fired. The dog ran back towards Himmat Khan's entrenchment. Himmat Khan called out, "Be brave. Don't be afraid of anything. Go back." He fired a shot to frighten the enemy.

Jamadar Harnam Singh fired back. The bullet nearly touched one of the ears of the dog. He jumped in terror and shook his ears.

Himmat Khan fired a second shot. The bullet got entrenched into a stone near the dog's front toes. He was confused. He started running aimlessly.

His confusion amused both Harnam Singh and Himmat Khan and they laughed uproariously for a long time. The dog was now running towards the entrenchments of Jamadar Harnam Singh.

Harnam Singh swore at him and aimed another shot. This time he was hit on the leg. A scream tore the the heart of the sky and echoed in all directions.

The dog turned. He then started limping towards Himmat Khan's side. A shot was fired to scare the enemy. Himmat Khan shouted, "Be brave. Dont care for your wounds. Go, go back."

Hearing the gun shot, the dog turned again. One of his legs was bleeding. He dragged himself with great difficulty for a few steps when Harnam Singh's shot hit him and he fell dead.

Subedar Himmat Khan said, "Poor thing...he has become a martyr."

Jamadar Harnam Singh held the warm barrel of his gun in his hand and commented, "He has died the death of a dog."

The Will of Gurmukh Singh

Occasionally there were cases of rioting and killing but now it had become a regular feature. News of the fights kept pouring in. Besides knives, kirpans, swords and guns were being used by most people.

Nearly everyone in Amritsar was of the opinion that these communal riots won't last long. It was only excitement, just as it subsides the situation will again become normal. Earlier riots had spread in Amritsar but had always ended within days. For ten or fifteen days killings would take place and then peace followed. The opinion, that this time it will be the same was based on experience. But it didn't happen. The riots kept increasing day by day.

The Muslims living in the Hindu streets had started running away. Similarly, the Hindus residing in Muslim areas had started going away to securer places. Everyone thought that this was a temporary arrangement—at least till the time the atmosphere doesn't become clear, clean and rid of the poison of riots.

Mian Abdul Hai, retired Sub-judge, was hundred per cent certain that the situation will improve very soon, and was not very worried. He had an eleven-year-old son and a seventeen-year-old daughter, and a seventy-year-old servant. It was a small family. But Mian Saheb had stocked plenty of rations in his house, just to be on safe side.

But his young daughter Sughra was very worried. They had a three-storeyed house, higher than the other buildings. Three-fourths of the rest of the town was visible from its top.

Sughra had noticed that for the past many days some place or the other was always on fire. Lately, even the fire brigade had not been heard or seen. May be because so many places were on fire.

The night presented an entirely different scenery now. Big flames of fire rose like big giants in the utter darkness of the night. These giants emitted fire from their mouths like a fountain, slogans like Allah-o-Akbar and Har-Har-Mahadev made the night terrifying.

Sughra refrained from talking about her fears to her father,

for he had repeatedly assured her that there was nothing to worry about. All was going to be well. Sughra knew that her father was usually right. But when the taps stopped flowing and the electricity was cut she mentioned her worry to him. Also, she hesitantly suggested: "Let us go to Sharifpur for a few days. All our Muslim neighbours are going away."

Her father stuck to his decision: "There is no cause for alarm. The situation will soon improve." But instead of improving the situation kept deteriorating day by day. The street where Mian Abdul Hai lived was vacated by all the Muslims. Mian Saheb was bed-ridden and by God's will one day he was suddenly paralysed. His son Basharat, who was usually busy playing different kinds of games in the house, just sat near his father's bed, as if he understood the delicacy of the moment.

Outside their house the bazar was deserted. Doctor Ghulam Mustafa's dispensary had been closed for many days. Sughra noticed that Doctor Guranditta's dispensary had not been opened for the past many days. Mian Saheb's condition was serious. Sughra was so worried that she had nearly lost her senses. She took Basharat to the next room and said, "For God's sake, do something. I know it is not safe to go out. But you go . . . and call someone. Abba's condition is dangerous."

Basharat went out but was back within moments. His face had turned yellow like turmeric. At the crossing he had seen a dead body, drenched in blood. In a nearby shop some men, their beards tied up with a piece of cloth, were looting. Sughra pulled her frightened brother and embraced him, thanking God. But she could not bear to see the condition of her father, for his left side was now totally deadened. His speech was so effected that he could only talk in gestures. All he said was, "Sughra, there is nothing to worry. All will be well by God's will.

Only two day's fasting for the Roza's were left; Mian Saheb had thought that by In all will become normal. But now it looked as if the day of Id was going to be the Doomsday. The entire city was now engulfed in clouds of smoke. Sughra and Basharat could not sleep for a moment at night, because they could hear terrifying sounds of bomb explosions.

Sughra in any case had to be up at night for looking after her father. But now she felt that these explosions were taking place in her brain. Alternately she looked at her paralysed father and then at her scared brother. The seventy-year-old servant Akbar was just good for nothing; all he could do was cough and spit all day and night.

One day Sughra got sick of him and lost her temper. "What kind of a person are you? Can't you see the condition of Mian Saheb? You are the most unfaithful servant. Now that you have got an opportunity to serve your master, you keep resting pretending you have got asthma."

Later Sughra felt sorry for scolding the poor old man. At night when she took him his dinner she was surprised to find him missing. The latch of the outer door was open. Obviously he had gone out—may be to do something for Mian Saheb. Sughra prayed for his safe return but he did not come back for two days.

It was evening. Sughra and Basharat had seen many such evenings, full of merriment on Id day. How their eyes used to be fixed on the moon! Tomorrow is Id, only the moon has to confirm it. In the past years, how keenly they used to wait for this confirmation! If ever a stubborn cloud appeared and stayed at the portion where the moon was expected to rise how angry they used to get! Now all they could see were clouds of smoke all around. Sughra and Basharat went to the top of their house. On the top of some of the houses they could see the shadows of some people. It was hard to find out whether they were looking for the moon or at the spreading fire.

Inspite of the smoke-screen she could see the moon rising. She raised her hands and prayed for the recovery of her father. Basharat was feeling agitated that due to the riots a good Id festival had been spoilt.

The day had not yet ended. The evening had not darkened. Mian Saheb had been brought out in the water-sprinkled veranda, he was lying on his charpoy without any movement, looking at the sky with vacant eyes. No one knew what he was thinking.

After spotting the moon Sughra came and wished her father. He gestured his reply. He put his right hand lovingly on her bent head. Tears started rolling down Sughra's eyes.

Mian Saheb's eyes also became wet. To reassure her, he with great difficulty uttered these words: "God will set everything right."

At that moment someone knocked at the door. Sughra missed a heart beat. She looked at Basharat; his face had become like a sheet of white paper.

There was another knock on the door. Mian Saheb looked at Sughra and asked her to see who it was.

Sughra said to Basharat, "It must be Akbar. Go and see."

Milan Saheb moved his head as if he wanted to say: "No, this is not Akbar."

"Who can it then be, Abba?"

Mian Abdul Hai tried to speak. Basharat came back and whispered in a frightened voice, "It is a Sikh."

Sughra couldn't help screaming, "Sikh! What is he saying?"

Basharat told her that he wants us to open the door.

A trembling Sughra clung to Basharat and sat down near her father's bed. She looked at him with lost eyes.

A strange smile appeared on the thin lifeless lips of Mian Abdul Hai. "Go . . . it is Gurmukh Singh."

"No, it is someone else," said Basharat.

Mian Saheb said in a decisive voice, "Go Sughra, open the door. It *is* Gurmukh Singh."

Sughra got up. She thought she can recognise Gurmukh Singh. Her father had helped save this Sikh from a cooked up case. Since then on the eve of every Id he used to bring a bagful of fine *sevians* for them. Her father had often said to him, "Sardarji, you must not take the trouble," but invariably he used to reply, "Mian Saheb, with Guruji's grace you have everything. This is only a gift, which I bring for you every year. What you have done for me cannot be repaid by my hundred generations. May God always keep you happy!"

Sughra was surprised that how did she fail to remember that it must be Gurmukh Singh. But why did Basharat say that it was someone else? Who else could it be? She went to the door wondering whether to open it or ask who it was. She had not yet decided when she heard another knock. Her heart started beating faster. With great difficulty she found her voice and asked, "Who is it?"

Basharat, who was standing near her, said, "Look through

this hole in the door."

She did. It was not Gurmukh Singh. The Sikh standing outside was young. He again knocked on the door. Sughra noticed a bag in his hand. The bag looked like Gurmukh used to bring.

She again asked, a bit loudly this time, "Who is it?"

"I am Sardar Gurmukh Singh's son—Santokh."

Sughra was not afraid now. Politely she asked, "What brings you here?"

"Where is Judge Saheb?"

"He is ill."

"Oh . . . " Santokh's voice was sorrowful. He moved the bagful of *sevian* and said, "I have brought the *sevian* . . . Sardarji has passed away . . . he is no more."

"He is no more?" asked Sughra quickly.

"Yes . . . it has been a month now . . . Before he died he had told me that for the past ten years he had been bringing *sevian* for Judge Saheb on every eve of Id. After my death you have to continue doing so . . . I had promised him this and I am keeping my word. Please take these *sevian.*"

Her eyes were filled with tears. She opened the door. He handed over the bag to her. Sughra said, "May Sardarji go to heaven!"

Gurmukh Singh's son now asked, "Is Judge Saheb ill?"

"Yes."

"What is the ailment?"

"He is paralysed."

"Oh . . . Sardarji would have felt very unhappy if he was alive. Even when he died he always remembered Judge Saheb's favour. He always said that Judge Saheb is not a human being, he is an angel. Pay my respects to him." Saying this he stepped down . . . Sughra wanted to stop him and ask him to arrange for a doctor. But she didn't know how to say it.

Sardar Gurmukh Singh's son, Santokh Singh, had hardly gone a couple of yards away from Judge Saheb's house when a few Sikhs, with their faces tied up with cloth, came towards him.

Two of them were carrying torches, the other two had tins of kerosene oil and some other things for setting fire. One of them asked Santokh, "Sardarji, have you done your work?"

"Yes, I have."

The man laughed, through the cloth tied on his face and said, "Shall we put an end to Judge Saheb's life?"

"Just as you wish!" Saying this Sardar Gurmukh Singh's son went away.

Sharifan

When Qasim opened the door of his house the only pain he had was in his left calf, where a bullet had got stuck. But when he entered his house and saw the dead body of his wife, murder suddenly appeared in his eyes. He had nearly decided to pick up the hatchet and go out on an orgy of killing when he remembered his daughter Sharifan.

"Sharifan... Sharifan...," he called out loudly. The door was closed from inside. He thought that she must have locked herself in—she must have been frightened. He went towards the door, put his mouth on the small hole on the door and said, "Sharifan, I am your father. Sharifan, listen to me..."

But he received no reply from inside. Qasim pushed open the door. He nearly fell on his face. While he was trying to get up he realised he was near a... Suddenly Qasim screamed and sat up. Only a yard away a young girl's dead body, absolutely naked, was lying on the floor. Fair, well-built body, small firm breasts... Qasim's entire being was shaken up. Inside his soul a scream was born that could touch the sky, but his lips were sealed in a manner that his scream could not escape them. His eyes automatically closed and yet he covered his face with his hands. A sound emitted from him, "Sharifan." With his eyes still closed he fished out some clothes and threw them on Sharifan's dead body. He then went out without realising that the clothes had not covered properly his daughter's body.

He came out but this time did not notice the body of his wife, or it is possible that his eyes overlooked it because he was so shocked at seeing Sharifan's body. He picked up the hatchet and went out.

A bullet was embedded in Qasim's left calf, but the moment he entered his house he totally forgot the pain of it. His dear faithful wife was dead. But in no corner of his mind he was feeling the pain of his loss. They only picture he could see was that of Sharifanthe... naked Sharifan... like the tip of a spear this image pierced his eyes and then tore his soul.

Hatchet in hand, Qasim was running in the deserted bazars like boiling lava. On the crossing he was faced with a young well built Sikh. Qasim attacked in a peculiar aimless manner and with such force that the Sikh fell like an uprooted tree in a storm.

The blood in Qasim's veins became hotter and started boiling in a way as if a few droops of water had spilled in hot oil.

A little away from the crossing, he saw some men. Like an arrow he went towards them. They shouted: "Har-Har Mahadev." Instead of replying with "Allah-o-Akbar" Qasim called them by choicest four-letter words, flung his hatchet in the air and entered that group.

In a few moments three dead bodies were writhing on the road. The others had run away, yet Qasim was flinging his hatchet in all directions. He was doing so with closed eyes. He hit a dead body while moving around and fell down. He thought someone had attacked him and pushed him down. He started shouting swear-words and screamed, "Kill me! Kill me!"

But when he realised that no one was touching him or attacking him he opened his eyes. Besides himself and three dead bodies no one else was visible on the road.

For a moment Qasim was disappointed. He wanted to die. Suddenly he remembered Sharifan... the naked Sharifan... her image like molten lead flew through his eyes and turned his entire being into burning dynamite. He stood up at once. Once again he was flowing on the road like boiling lava.

All the bazaars Qasim went to were totally deserted. He entered a street. But when he realised that all the inhabitants were Muslims he felt miserable. He turned his lava to another direction. Entering a bazaar he flung his hatchet in air and once again started shouting the worst possible swear-words concerning mothers and sisters,

Suddenly he realised, rather painfully, that till now he had not said a single swear-word about daughters. He shouted all the names he could recall. But he was not satisfied. He went towards a house. Something was written on the door in Hindi.

The door was bolted from inside. Like a mad man Qasim broke open the door with his hatchet. He then went inside the small house.

Qasim's throat was dry. He started shouting, "Come out, come out." He was very agitated.

A door opened slowly and a girl appeared.

Qasim asked in a tough voice, "Who are you?"

"A Hindu." The girl wet her dry lips with her tongue.

Qasim was standing erect. With burning eyes he looked at the girl who was hardly fifteen years old. He jumped at the girl like an eagle and pushed her into the courtyard. Like an insane person, he started tearing her clothes with both his hands. Her clothes were torn to pieces and the threads were flying on all sides as if someone was beating up cotton wool. Qasim spent nearly half an hour taking his revenge. The girl did not protest because she had fainted as soon as she fell on the floor.

When Qasim opened his eyes he found his hands embedded in the girl's neck. With a jerk he stood up. He was drenched in perspiration. He looked at the girl for fuller satisfaction.

A yard away lay the dead body of the young girl—naked, absolutely naked... Fair, well-built body, small erect breasts. Suddenly Qasim's eyes closed. He covered his face with his hands. The hot perspiration on his body turned into ice, and the boiling lava in his veins became hard like a stone.

A little later a man, with a sword in his hand, came in. He saw that a man with eyes closed was trying to cover something with trembling hands in the courtyard. He asked, "Who are you?"

Qasim was startled. His eyes opened but he could see nothing. The man with the sword shouted, "Qasim!"

Qasim was once again startled. He tried to recognise the man but his eyes failed him.

The man was very upset. He asked, "What are you doing here?"

Qasim pointed towards the blanket with a trembling hand and in an empty voice was able to utter only one word, "Sharifan..."

The man stepped forward quickly, removed the blanket, and trembled when he saw the naked body. He closed his eyes. The sword fell from his hand.

He then stumbled out of his house, with his hands on his eyes, and uttering the words, "Bimla... Bimla..."

Black Margins

The crowd changed its direction and attacked the statue of Sir Ganga Ram. It was hit with sticks, bricks and stones. One of them applied bitumen to the face, another collected shoes, made a garland of it and started to put it around the statue's neck when police arrived. They fired and the man with the garland of shoes was wounded. He was sent to Sir Ganga Ram Memorial Hospital for treatment.

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"I worked so hard yet all I could get was this tin—and it contains pork," said a looter to his friend.

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A man chose a wooden box for himself. But it was big and heavy and he could not move it even an inch. Another man, who had failed to find anything for himself, said, "Can I help you in carrying the box?"

The man agreed. The other man was quite strong. He put the box on his back and carried it alone. The first man walked out with him, and in order to maintain his claim on the box, he just kept one hand of his on the box.

When they reached a safe spot, the carrier put the box on the ground and asked, "What will be my share from this box?"

The first man replied, "Well, one-fourth."

"This is too little."

"Certainly not. I spotted the box first."

"That's O.K. but who has carried it to this place—a heavy thing like this?"

"All right. Let it be half and half."

"O.K. Open the box."

The box was opened. Out came a sturdy man with a sword in his hand. As he stepped out he cut the two men into four portions.

A group of forty to fifty men with sticks in their hands was moving towards a house with the intent of looting and rioting. Suddenly, a thin middle-aged man came forward cutting through the crowd. Like a leader he turned towards the crowd and said, "Brothers, there is unaccountable wealth in this house, and immense amount of expensive things. Let us get hold of all that is inside and distribute it among ourselves."

The sticks swung in the air, fists were clenched and a fountain of slogans in strong language burst out. The group followed the thin middle-aged man into the house that contained so much wealth.

At the main door of the house the thin man stopped and, turning towards the rioters, said, "Brothers, all the things in this house belong to you. But make sure that you won't fight for anything among yourselves... Now come...

"The door is looked," one of them shouted.

Another one shouted in answer, 'Break it."

Once again sticks swung in the air, fists were clenched and a fountain of slogans in strong language burst out.

The thin man stopped them by indicating with his hand, smiled and said, "Wait, my brothers, I'll open it with the key."

He took out a bunch of keys from his pocket, looked for the right key and opened the door with it. The heavy teak door opened to the accompaniment of a screech and the mad mob moved forward to go in. The thin man, wiping the perspiration on his head with sleeves, said, "Brothers, take it easy. All that is inside this house is yours. What is the need for this disorderly hurry?"

Immediately the mob became disciplined. One by one the rioters filed in. But just as the looting started, the people became disorderly. Ruthlessly the rioters began looting the things.

Looking at this scene the thin man spoke to the leaders in a very pained voice, "Brothers, slowly... slowly..! There is no

need to fight, no need to snatch anything. Cooperate with each other. Do not be jealous if someone has got a more expensive thing. It is such a big house, look for something else. But while doing this don't become brutes. If you fight like this, the things will break and you will be the losers."

Once again the leaders became organised.

Slowly, the house full of expensive things started becoming empty. Occasionally the thin man kept advising them, "Look my brother, this is a radio, pick it up carefully so that it doesn't break... Here take the wire away too... fold it, my brother, fold it... this is a stool made from the wood of a walnut tree, with ivory inlaid in it, it is very delicate... yes, now it is all right... No, no, don't drink here, you will get drunk, take it home. Wait, just wait, let me switch off the mains so that you don't get a shock."

Suddenly the noise in a corner became louder. Four rioters were fighting over a length of silk.

The thin man rushed towards them and in a very soft tone said, "How ignorant you are! This expensive cloth will turn into threads. Why don't you use the measuring tape? There is everything in the house. Look for the tape and divide the cloth equally."

Suddenly a large shepherd dog came charging in. Barking and jumping he caught hold of two of the leaders, and then he turned to the third, shaking them all up. The thin man shouted, "Tiger, Tiger!"

Tiger had the sleeve of one of the leaders in his fierce mouth. He, with eyes cast down, moved obediently towards the thin man...

With the arrival of the dog all the looters had ran away except the one whose sleeve was in the mouth of the dog. He looked at the thin man and asked, "Who are you?"

The thin man smiled, "The owner of this house. Look, be careful, the glass jar is slipping out of your hand."

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—Translated by Saroj Vashistha

AGYEYA

Agyeya, or S.H. Vatsyayan as his full name goes, has dominated the Hindi literary scene now for over three decades. His half a dozen short stories on the theme of Partition explore the problem from various angles. Two of these are presented here.

No Revenge

Having managed to shove her baggage in, dumped the child in her lap on the bare seat, pushed her daughter up the steps and scrambled in herself just as the train started to move, Suraiya heaved a deep sigh in the name of Allah, the Protector, and looked round the dark compartment. She realised that two shadow figures, all wrapped up in their *chaddars,* in the deep gloom at the other end of the compartment, were not Muslims, brothers of the faith, but—Sikhs. In the streaks of light from the station lamp, as the train picked up speed, it seemed to her that she could see something inhuman in their unblinking eyes. It was as if their eyes stared at her without seeing her; their aloofness had a cutting edge which helped them see through everything—something intangible but dangerous. She could not have seen this in the inadequate light, but with a vision sharpened by imagination she saw that those eyes were bloodshot, and—she shivered with fear. But it was too late to change into another compartment, the train was moving too fast. She could have jumped from the moving train, but being thrown out by another traveller would be much worse than jumping from the train herself with her children! Her eyes wandered to the handle of the alarm chain dangling above her. As she sagged uncertainly into her seat, she thought she would see at the next station. The short run upto there should not be too dangerous.

"How far would you be going?"

Suraiya started. It was the older Sikh. How heavy his voice sounded! She was suddenly struck by the irony of someone using the polite form of address towards her—someone

who might a couple of stations later kIll her, throw her body out of the train. She did not answer. The Sikh asked again, "How far would you be travelling?"

Suraiya had turned the *burqa* back. Now she pulled it over her face as she answered, "I am going to Etawah."

The Sikh thought for a moment before he spoke, "No one with you?"

Suraiya noted the moment's pause. He must have been calculating how much time he would have to kill me, she thought. Please, God, some passengers come at the next station... and he must see there were others with her—perhaps that would frighten him. Although in such times it meant nothing unless your companions sat with you in the same compartment... If someone should stab her... was she going to wait till the next station for someone to come to the window to ask if she needed anything...

She said, "My brother is in the next compartment."

The child jerked himself up. "Where, Mother? Uncle is in Lahore."

Suraiya said in a fierce undertone, "Shut up, Abid!"

After a pause the Sikh asked again, "Do you have your own people in Etawah?"

"Yes."

The Sikh was silent again for a while. Then he said, "Your brother should have sat with you. Whoever sits apart from one's womenfolk in these times?"

Has the old fox guessed that I am unaccompanied, thought Suraiya uneasily.

The Sikh said slowly as if to himself, "But in misfortune there is never anyone to stand by—all are alone."

The train was slowing down. A wayside station. Suraiya was undecided—should she stick on or get out? Two other passengers climbed in. 'Hindus,' registered Suraiya's mind quickly. She grew really frightened and started gathering her bundles.

"Are you getting down?" asked the Sikh.

"I might go and as well sit with my brother—," said Suraiya. Strange animal, man, taking subterfuge behind falsehood even at such moments... and what palpable falsehood! If there had been a brother, would he not have come himself to

help change compartments?

"Please remain seated," said the Sikh. "There is nothing to fear here. I consider you my sister and these kids to be my own children. I will see you safely upto Aligarh and beyond Aligarh you will be in no danger; from there—your brotheren will also join you on the train."

One of the Hindus said, "Let her go if she wants to, Sardarji. Why should you bother?"

It would have been difficult for Suraiya to decide how to take the Sikh's words or the Hindu's comments; but the train decided things for her by moving. She sat down.

The Hindu spoke, "Are you coming from Punjab, Sardarji?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is your home?"

"Home was in Shekhupura. Now—now it is here."

"What do you mean, here?"

"Home is where I am now, in this corner of the railway compartment."

The Hindu seemed to measure his words. It was as if someone should pour out a little pity into a cup and hold it forward. He said, "So you are refugees..."

And the Sikh, almost as if one should push the cup aside with a 'No, thank you, I do not drink,' said with a dry laugh, "Yes, sir."

There was a reasonance in that laugh which the Hindu could not catch. He spoke with even greater interest, "You people must have gone through unspeakable suffering." For a fraction of a moment the Sikh's eyes smouldered, but he did not rise to the bait, he kept silent.

The Hindu went on looking at Suraiya. "People in Delhi tell of the atrocities they have committed there on Hindus and Sikhs. The things they tell—one tingles with shame to put them into words. Women were stripped and--"

The Sikh turned to the other wrapped up figure beside him and said gently, "Son, go and stretch yourself on the upper berth." It was obvious that they were father and son; and when the lad stood up obediently and stretched his slim 16-year-old body as he surveyed the bunk, his eyes showed the same amber glow that had smouldered in the older Sikh's eyes. He climbed up and stretched himself; on the lower seat the Sikh

straightened his legs and looked out of the window.

The Hindu resumed his interrupted speech, "Sisters and daughters were stripped before their brothers and fathers—"

"There is no need, Babu Saheb, to describe in words what we have seen with our own eyes," said the Sikh. The resonance was clearer than before, but it seemed that the Hindu gentleman had still not noticed it. Feeling encouraged, he continued, "You are right. We cannot understand your suffering. We sympathise, but after all sympathy does not mean very much if we do not know the magnitude of the suffering. After all how can we understand how those Sikhs must have felt who saw their own daughters and daughters-in-law being stripped before their eyes—"

The Sikh's words quivered as he said, "All people have daughters and daughters-in-law, Babu Saheb."

The Hindu gentleman felt just a little abashed at not being able to understand the precise meaning of the Sardar's statement. But he was not put off for too long. "Now at last Hindus and Sikhs are also making up," he said. "Vengeance is not a good thing, but how much can one endure? Now in Delhi there have been pitched battles and in some places they have applied the rule of an eye for an eye. In truth that is the only thing that will work. They say that in Karol Bagh a Muslim doctor's daughter—"

This time it was not a mere resonance; there was an explicit grating harshness in the Sikh's tone as he said, "Babu Saheb, a woman's shame is everybody's shame and, Sister," here he turned towards Suraiya, "I seek forgiveness that you should have to listen to all this."

The Hindu gentleman, taken aback, said, "What, what, what? I have said nothing to her." Then restraining himself and yet insolently he said, "Is she, is the lady with you?"

The Sikh, even more harshly, answered, "Yes, I am seeing her to Aligarh."

Something within Suraiya said, 'This old gentleman is going to Aligarh. *To Aligarh*, poor old man...' She gathered up courage to say, "Are you getting down at Aligarh?"

"Yes."

"Do you have your relations there?"

"I have no relations anywhere. My son is with me."

"Why are you going to Aligarh? To stay?"

"No, I will be back tomorrow."

"Then you are going there—for pleasure?"

"For pleasure!" answered the Sikh in a lost voice. "Pleasure!" Then he seemed to pull himself together. "No, we are not going anywhere—we are only looking for somewhere to go. Meanwhile one can stay in a moving train and think."

Something in Suraiya's mind again prodded her, 'But Aligarh—*Aligarh*... poor old man...'

Aloud she said, "Aligarh—is not a nice place. Do you have to go there?"

The Hindu with the air of a man showing pity on a lunatic said, "Ask a question—"

"Good or bad, all places are the same for me."

"But—but aren't you afraid? Someone could stab you in the night—"

The Sikh smiled wryly. "That might even seem release, you know."

"Oh please, don't say such things!"

"But really. And who would stab me? He would be either a Muslim or a Hindu. If he should be a Muslim I will go and join wherever the rest of my family has gone, and if it should be a Hindu I would consider that that was all that was still needed—that the killer sickness has now reached its peak and that the road to hell will now begin."

"But why would a Hindu kill? A Hindu may be very wicked but would not do such a thing—"

The Sardar suddenly quivered with anger. His tone was withering as he said, "You do talk, Babu Saheb! A moment ago you were telling about Delhi with such obvious relish—if you had a knife and had no fear for yourself, wouldn't you have—would you have spared your co-passengers?—these, or—if I had intervened—me?" Seeing that the Hindu gentleman was about to protest, the Sikh shut him up with an imperious gesture. "You might as well hear it—you asked for it. You show me compassion because I am your refugee. Compassion is a great thing and I would consider myself blessed if you were fit to give compassion. But how can you understand my suffering if in the same breath you can talk of happenings in Delhi in this callous fashion? If you could really share my grief—if

you had heart enough for it—then the things you want to tell would have made you sink with shame and grow dumb. A woman's shame is a woman's shame; it is not the shame of a Hindu or Muslim, it is the shame of the mother of man. I know what happened with us in Shekhupura—but I cannot avenge it because for that there can be no revenge. I can only give retribution—retribution that I should not let what happened to me happen to anyone else. It is for this reason that I keep shuttling back and forth between Delhi and Aligarh escorting people from one side to the other; it helps me pass my days and also to make some amends. If during these journeys someone should kill me, retribution would be complete—whether the killer is a Muslim or a Hindu. What I strive for is no one have to see what I have seen, whether he is a Hindu or Sikh or Muslim. May God grant that no one should see his family suffer what mine went through!"

After this there was total silence in the compartment. When the train slowed down for Aligarh, Suraiya tried hard to say a few words of gratitude to the Sardar, but she seemed to have lost her voice.

It was the Sardar himself who half rose and called towards the upper berth, "Come down, son, this is Aligarh." Then he turned towards the Hindu gentleman and said, "Babu Saheb, I seek forgiveness for any hard words I might have said; you are our refuge."

The Hindu gentleman's expression showed clearly that if the Sikh had not been getting down there he himself would have shifted to another compartment.

Muslim-Muslim Bhai-Bhai

There is no epidemic like fear, particularly because fear is not really a sickness—even the healthiest know fear—and fear kills not by itself but through other sicknesses. One could almost say that it is not a pestilence but the mother of pestilences.

Or else why would it happen that wherever there was fear, hate and violence and meanness would follow—followed in their turn by so many suppressed ailments of the human soul! The pestilence hit Sardarpura hard. An infection is generally spread by a carrier; in the case of Sardarpura the carrier was innocent looking enough—the daily newspaper.

Actually the papers had been running news of rioting and violence and confusion for the last several days, and Sardarpura had even seen some refugees; but these were transients moving in either direction. Sardarpura itself had so far remained unaffected.

There was nothing special in the newspaper on that day either. Even the news of disturbances carried by the Jats or Meos were not particularly different—just fresh additions to the familiar list of killings. There was just one line which was new: It is reported that groups of Jats are preparing to make hit and run attacks in several places.

It was on this flimsy peg that a whole host of rumours had been hung. It was said that a large group of Jats, fully armed with guns, was marching towards Sardarpura, scattering handbills of a new circus of death.

The morning train had already left. The next train left at night; even ordinarily it was very crowded and these days the rush was unspeakable. Even so by the late afternoon the platform was packed with intending travellers. If one could ignore the expressions on people's faces, one might have imagined the milling crowd was of the devotees heading for a saint's day fair.

The train arrived. Pendemonium broke loose. People clambered in through doors and windows; those, who could not, climbed on to the roof, hung on to door handles or even straddled on the bumpers between bogies. When one had to go, one went as one could; in any case not having bought

tickets how could they claim comfort...

The train left. How could it pull out and move was a wonder, but dead metal has certain advantages over live flesh.

After the train had gone, one could see little groups of passengers huddling here and there on the platform like piles of garbage after a fair. These were people who had failed or being too faint of heart to participate in the melee—old men, sick men, a few women. It is one of these groups that holds our attention.

Sakina said, "Ya Allah! Who knows what's going to happen!"

Amina replied, "I hear another train is coming soon—and is a special. It'll go straight through Delhi to Pakistan. It's carrying Government officials. Why shouldn't we board that one?"

"When will it pass?

"In an hour—perhaps two hours—"

"But will they let us board it?" asked Jamila. "They will all be officers."

"But they will be Musalmans - why won't they let us get in?"

"Yes, they will be our brothers."

A sort of fatigue gradually enveloped the station. Amina, Jamila and Sakina sat huddled and silent, each lost in her own thoughts. A careful observer might have noted a sort of basic sameness in their thoughts despite the play of colour on the surface. All three had husbands abroad—two were in the army and posted to the frontier. They had written to their wives to say that they would shortly be able to come to fetch them; Sakina's husband was employed with the Port Authority at Karachi—a bad correspondent at all times, even if he had written now, the letter might have been lost in the general confusion... Sakina had come to visit her parents for a few days and been obliged to stay on. Her daughter was still in Karachi with her sister-in-law. Amina had lost her first two children in their infancy. Jamila's husband had gone abroad with his company soon after marriage and had not been home for four years now. The lives of all three were centred in their husbands, not in their children; the current confusion only empha-

sized this dependence. Who knows what's going to happen... They had yet to see the world—to see life—what had they seen yet? What was there to see in Sardarpura anyway? The chief virtue of the town had been that nothing ever happened there and one could pass one's days undisturbed; and now even that was no longer true. Who knows what's going to happen... It would be Allah's great mercy if they got out from there alive and whole...

A wave of activity started from the Station Master's office and spread quickly along the platform. Presently the train rumbled in and pulled to a stop.

Amina, Sakina ond Jamila were not heavily burdened with baggage—a small trunk and a cloth bundle each. Such ornaments as they had could easily be carried in the box and one couldn't bother too much about clothes. In any case, in these days of rationing there wasn't very much to which one could be attached.

"The Zanana is over there," said Jamila and the three left towards the compartment.

It certainly was a ladies' compartment, but of the Second Class. Beds had been spread on all the four berths; four women sat on the lower berths, two with infants in their laps. One of them said sternly, "Get off, there is no room here."

Amina, who was leading, was taken aback. Then she gathered up courage and started to climb on as she said, "We will sit on the floor, sister—we are hit by calamity—"

"That's nothing to do with us," said the same woman even more rudely. "Get off and look elsewhere."

Jamila said, "There's no call for rudeness, sister. We have to travel too."

"Then go and find a place in the Third Class. You dare to answer me!" The woman sat the child heavily, rose and pushing Jamila out bolted the door from inside.

Jamila could not take the affront. She said, "Such arrogance is not right, sister. We are Musalmans too—"

At this all the four passengers inside began to scream together. This did not make their speech particularly intelligible, but what Jamila could gather was that she should not talk big or else they would have to call the Guard—to which Sakina

responded, "Do call the Guard. He will have to find us seats somewhere."

"Sure, sure. Find you seats indeed! You have been told this is a Special—this is not just for anybody. But who is to knock sense into these thickskulls!" The speaker suddenly leaned out and called towards the adjacent compartment, "Amjad Bhai, come and take care of these pests—"

Amjad Bhai appeared immediately, still in his widely striped pajamas, with a thick veneer of authority on his face. "What's up?" he asked, pushing Amina aside.

"These pests! I told them that there's no room here but they are trying to force their way in. I have told them that this is a Special, that this is Second Class, but they won't listen. And this one in front—'

"You there, why don't you get along? There's no room here. One should keep within one's station—"

"And what's wrong with our station?" said Jamila truculently. Our menfolk earn an honest living. We are Musalmans. We want to go to Pakistan and—"

"And tickets?"

"And why don't you go by an ordinary train?"

Amina spoke half to herself, "If one can't help in adversity, one might at least refrain from adding torture! Who is interested in a Special? We just want to get out of here. In Islam all are equal. Such arrogance—Allah protect us!"

"Equal indeed! The likes of you! The dirt on my shoes—"

The train whistled.

Holding on one door handle, Jamila tried to reach in to draw the bolt as Amjad Bhai held to the other handle to push her back.

Sakina was holding on to the same handle as Jamila:

The voice from inside turned to a shrill scream.

"Don't you dare, shameless hussies! These sluts know neiether shame nor—"

"Allah will hear you," said Sakina quivering with anger. "Allah is just. We are poor but we have committed no sin—"

The voice from within came charged with sarcasm. "You are pure indeed! You have lived among Hindus, now you are running away from their midst—how come? Would they have left you off untouched? You must have been laid a hundred

times by them and now you come bragging your sinlessness! Bitch!"

Jamila let go off the handle as if it was hot iron. Turning to Sakina she said, "Let's go, sister. Stand back from here."

Sakina stepped back and raised her hands to her forehead, "Ya Allah!"

The train moved. Amjad Bhai took a leap and climbed on to his compartment.

For a while Jamila stood petrified and speechless. Then she tried to speak but words would not come. Finally she rounded her lips into a pout, turned towards the train and spat. After a moment she spat again.

Amina heaved a deep sigh and said slowly, "There goes the Pakistan Ispecial. Allah protect us!"

—Translated by the Author

KRISHAN CHANDER

Krishan chander, a senior Urdu writer, has written some remarkable short stories on the theme of Partition. The two presented here have been very much liked and discussed.

The Peshawar Express

I heaved a sigh of relief as I pulled out of the Peshawar railway station. My carriages were jam-packed with passengers, all of them Hindus. They had converged here from Peshawar, Hoti Mardan, Kohat, Charsada, the Khyber, Landikotal, Bannu, Naushehra and Mansahra. Overcome by a sense of grave insecurity in Pakistan, they were trying to escape to India. The railway station was under heavy military guard, the soldiers constantly on the alert. The refugees who had taken shelter with me, felt greatly relieved when I slowly started moving towards the beloved land of Punjab. Fair, hefty and loose-limbed, clad in *kameez* and *salwars* and wearing *kullaed* turbans, they looked Pathans and spoke Pushto or rugged Punjabi. Two soldiers had been deployed in each carriage for their protection.

They were Baluchi soldiers. Flaunting plume-like *turras* over their turbans, they carried new rifles and smiled indulgently at these Hindu Pathans and at their women and children, who looked on fear-stricken, anxious to get away from the land where their families had lived for countless generations. Its rocky soil had toughened their sinews and they had drunk deep from its ice-cold fountains. Today the same land had forsaken them, refusing to shower its bounty on them. They were bidding good bye to their homeland with heavy heart and conjuring up visions of a new home. They were grateful that they were still alive and that their womenfolk had escaped molestation.

I sped on while the people sitting in the carriages cast the last lingering looks on the high rocky cliffs, at the greenery around them and its laughing valleys and fruit-laden orchards—

if only they could tuck the scenery in their breasts and carry it along with them! I felt so weighed down under their cataclysmic grief that it slowed down my speed.

People sat listless, looking a picture of woe till we reached Hasan Abdal. A large number of Sikhs had congregated at the station. They had come from Punja Saheb, carrying long *kirpans*, their faces tense with fear and their women and children looking around, alarmed. As they got into the train they heaved a sigh of relief and fell to talking with the other Hindus and Sikhs in the tarain. The houses of some of them had been burnt down and all that they possessed were the clothes they stood in. But there were others who had been able to retrieve even their broken cots and other petty belongings. The Baluchi guards stood in the doors, holding rifles at the ready. Looking very important, they looked at their companions from the corners of their eyes and gave meaningful winks.

I was stranded for a long time at Taxila railway station, and wondered what was this long wait for. Maybe there were more Hindu refugees joining us from the neighbouring villages.

The passengers took out their food and started eating. The children who had sat dumb out of fright now cackled and laughed. Girls peeped out of the windows and old men got their *hookas* going.

Soon they heard some noise in the distance mingled with the booming of drums. So the Hindu refugees were coming. And then a long procession came in sight. The drums boomed and the processionists raised slogans. The people in the train quickly hid their faces behind the windows for a ghastly sight greeted their eyes. Each Muslim in the procession was carrying the corpse of a Hindu on his shoulder. The blokes had been caught while making a bid for escape. Two hundred corpses. Arriving at the station, the Muslims with solemnity entrusted the corpses to the care of the Baluchi guards, enjoining upon them to escort the corpses with every care across the border. The Baluchi guards gleefully promised to carry out their wishes. They put ten or fifteen corpses in each carriage. This done, the processionists fired in the air and ordered the station master to allow the train to move out of the station.

I was about to start. But no, there was another signal for me to stop. The leader of the procession told the Hindu

refugees that with the going away of two hundred Hindus their villages had got denuded which would spell ruin for their business and trade. In lieu of the two hundred Hindus that were going away they would like to have a similar number picked up from the train. The Baluchi soldiers praised them for their wisdom and far sight. They pushed out a few Hindus from each compartment and entrusted them to the care of the mob.

"Line up, you infidels!" the leader of the mob thundered. He was the biggest landlord of the area and heard the echoes of *jehad* in his coursing blood.

The infidels stood statuesque. They were lifted up one by one and made to stand in line. Two hundred men. Two hundred living corpses, their faces drawn, their eyes picking them like arrows.

The Baluchi soldiers went into action. Fifteen people fell.

This was the station of Taxila.

The place once boasted of the leading university of Asia, where thousands of students flocked from distant places to study civilisation and culture.

Fifty more people fell.

The museum of Taxila housed unique images and inimitable jewellery, representing the finest examples of ancient art.

Thirty more persons collapsed to the ground.

Here the great King Kanishka held his sway and enriched the people as an exemplar of beauty, bringing prosperity to one and all.

Twenty-five more people met their final doom.

Here Lord Buddha preached the gospel of non-violence and his monks showed the people the true path to peace and salvation.

And then came the turn of the last among the group.

Here for the first time on the border of India had flown the flag of Islam—the flag which stood for brotherhood and equality among men.

They were all dead and gone. Allah-O Akbar!

The railway platform had turned red with the blood of the victims and when I pulled out of the station my wheels seemed to be slipping from the rails. I feared I would get derailed, bringing disaster to those who were hiding in the carriage.

Death had stalked through every carriage. There were corpses in the middle of each carriage, surrounded by living corpses over whom the Baluchi guard stood smiling. Somewhere a child whimpered, an old mother sobbed, a young wife moaned for her dead husband. Shrieking and whistling I tore through the distance and entered the Rawalpindi railway station.

Here no refugee got into the train except for a few young Muslims carrying rifles and accompanied by burqa-clad women. In one compartment they loaded arms and ammunition—machine guns, pistols, rifles and cartridges.

I had left Jhelum and was on my way to Gujrat when they pulled the alarm chain and brought me to a stop. They ripped off the burqas of the veiled women. "We are Hindus, we are Sikhs!" the women cried. "These people have abducted us." But the young men only laughed and dragged the women down the train. "We are going to have our way with these women," they shouted. "Come, if any one of you has the guts to stop us."

Two Hindu youths belonging to the Frontier jumped down from the train. The Baluchi guards blithely marked them with their rifles and shot them dead. More youths came out. They were knifed to death by the Muslim mob. A wall of flesh cannot compete against bullets and knives of steel.

The Muslim youth dragged the Hindu women into the jungle. Belching dark hideous smoke from my mouth I sped on. It appeared the whole earth was covered with the dark bodings of Doomsday. My breathing became stilted as if something had stuck in my chest which would tear it apart and the red flames which lay within me would erupt and engulf the whole jungle which had just now swallowed those fifteen women.

When we reached near Lalamusa the corpses started emitting such terrible stench that the Baluchi guards were forced to throw them out of the carrriages. They would beacon a man to come to them, instructing him to bring a dead body to the carrriage door. They would then push him through the door, corpse and all. In no time all the dead bodies were gone along with their companions, leaving sufficient space in the carriages for the people to stretch their legs in comfort.

Came Wazirabad, the famous place, known for its knives and daggers all over India. This was the town where for

centuries the Hindus and Muslims had celebrated every year with great eclat the festival of Baisakhi. The railway platform was littered with corpses. Perhaps this was a new way of celebrating the festival. Smoke billowed up from the city and near the station one could hear the sound of an English band to the accompaniment of clappings and plaudits of the crowd. In a few minutes the crowd had surged over the railway platform, dancing and singing villagers forming the vanguard, followed by a concourse of naked women ranging from old grannies to young virgins. They were Hindu and Sikh women and Muslim men and together they were celebrating the most gruesome Baisakhi. The women's hair hung loose, and though their bodies bore marks of injury they walked erect as if the heavy shadow of death had completely eclipsed their naked bodies.

A roar went up from the crowd. "Pakistan Zindabad! Islam Zindabad! Qaid-e'-Azam Zindabad!"

The dancing feet suddenly receded and the crowd surged forward towards the train. The women in the carriages pulled the veils over their faces and hurriedly put down the shutters.

The Baluchi guards objected. The windows must not be pulled down. They felt suffocated for want of proper ventilation.

But the women paid no heed to them. They went on pulling down the shutters. Infuriated, the Baluchi guards fired. But by then not a single window had remained open. Only a few refugees had to pay the price for it with their lives.

The naked women were made to sit among the refugees. I bid farewell to the place to the shouts of Islam Zindabad! Quaid e'-Azam Zindabad!

A child crawled to an old woman. "Mother," he asked, "why are you sitting naked?" He wondered if she was returning from her bath.

The old woman forced back her tears. Today the sons of her land had given her a sinister bath.

"And your clothes—where are they?" the child asked.

"The clothes bore the marks of my married bliss," the old woman replied. "They have taken them away to cleanse them of those marks."

Two young girls, sitting utterly naked, jumped out of the window. But unmindful of this calamity I sped on and did not stop till I had reached Lahore.

I was made to stop on Platform No. 1. Another train from Amritsar had been received on Platform No. 2. She was carrying Muslim refugees from India. No sooner had I stopped when Muslim volunteers made a thorough search of all the carriages and took away all the gold, silver and other valueables from the passengers. After this pillage they pulled out 400 passengers from the train and lined them up on the platform. They were the sacrificial lambs, for just now the Muslims had discovered that there were 400 passengers short in the train from Amritsar and 50 Muslim women had also been abducted from the same train. So to square up the loss, 50 Hindu women were hand-picked from my train and forced down on to the platform. To complete the tally, 400 Hindus were also butchered on the platform. The population parity between India and Pakistan must be maintained.

The Muslim volunteers formed themselves into a circle and stood there holding daggers. With great alacrity one Hindu at a time was pushed within the circle and was swiftly done away. All was over in a few minutes. The fatal counting was complete. I was allowed to pull out of the station.

By now I had started detesting each and every fibre of my body. I felt utterly polluted as if I had been thrown out of Hell.

As I reached Attari I sensed a change in the atmosphere. The Baluchi guards had been taken off at Moghulpura and their place had been taken by Dogra and Sikh guards. On reaching Attari the Hindu refugees saw so many dead bodies strewn all over the place that they went delirious with joy. They knew they had crossed the boundary line between India and Pakistan, otherwise how could their eyes be greeted by such fascinating scenes? When I arrived at Amritsar the joyous cries of Hindus and Sikhs shook the earth. There were Muslim corpses piled high. The Hindus and the Sikhs peeped into every carriage, asking if there was any quarry to be had, implying if there were any Muslims travelling incognito.

Four Brahmins got into a compartment. Shaved heads, long tufts, they were wearing Ram-nam *dhotis* and declared that they were bound for Hardwar. A couple of Hindu Jats and Sikhs, armed with rifles and spears who were going into

the interior of East Punjab for Muslim-baiting also got into the same compartment.

One of them became suspicious. "Holy Brahmin, where are you going?" he asked.

"To Hardwar on a pilgrimage," the Brahmin replied.

"Good man, are you going to Hardwar or Pakistan?"

"Ya Allah!" the Brahmin blurted out.

The Jat laughed. "We've got you," he said. ' We'll remember our Allah together."

He pierced his spear through the Brahmin's chest. The other Brahmins tried to escape but the Jats got hold of them. "Brahmin Gods!" they said blithely. "You must submit to the trouser test. The trouser test is a must for all who want to go on a pilgrimage to Hardwar."

They got down to ascertaining if their victims were circumcised. The four Muslims who were trying to pose as Brahmins failed the test and were done to death on the spot.

I proceeded on my journey.

On my way I was stopped in the thick of a jungle and some of the people from the train disappeared into the jungle. I thought a big contingent of armed Muslims was lying in wait to ambush the refugees. But what I saw froze my blood. A large number of Muslim peasants alongwith their women and children were hiding in the jungle.

The Muslim peasants were quickly encircled and the jungle rang with the cries of "Sat Sri Akal!" It did not take the attacking party more than a half hour to stalk the Muslims down and make a clean sweep of them. A Jat impaled the body of an infant on his spear and jubilantly flung it in the air.

A Pathan village this side of Jullundur caught their attention. The Hindus stopped the train and rushed into the village. The Pathans put up a spirited fight but they were outnumbered by the invaders and were soon put to the sword. With men and children out of the way it was now the turn of the women to be annihilated.

In those very fields where barns were brimming with the golden wheat, where the mustard flowers smiled, where young women, fed on the love legends of Heer and Ranjha and Sohni-Mahewal, bent like tender stalks under the loving gaze of their husbands, they hastily improvised temporary brothels

under the *peepul* and rosewood trees. Here fifty women were made to serve five hundred ravishers. Fifty sheep and five hundred butchers. Today the Punjab was dead. Waris Shah's Heer had suddenly become mute and its songs had been silenced for ever. A million curses on our leaders and their seven generations who tore the beautiful Punjab into pieces and buried its pure soul deep into the earth!

I was struck dumb with terror as the Sikhs, Dogras and Hindus returned, carrying the dead bodies of Pathan men and women. The rail track lay over a canal bridge. As I passed over the bridge I was forced to stop quite often to enable the people to dump the dead bodies into the canal. When all the dead bodies had been disposed off, people took out bottles of country liquor and boozed themselves with it. I proceeded on my journey stinking with booze and blood of the innocent.

At Ludhiana railway station the vandals got down from the train and made for the town where they ransacked the houses of the Muslims and returned loaded with the booty. Till they had ravaged and plundered to their heart's content and indulged in savagery they would not let me resume my journey. My soul was riddled with scars and my body stank to the skies, so polluted it was. I desperately felt the need for a bath. But I knew it was a vain hope; they wouldn't let me have it.

Around midnight when I reached Ambala Cantt. a Muslim Deputy Commissioner got into a First Class compartment with his family under military protection. A Sardar Saheb and his wife were also travelling in the same compartment. I had nearly traversed ten miles when I was made to stop. Some people smashed the window panes and forced their way into the compartment and did short work of the Deputy Commissioner, his wife and children. Then they stood facing his young, beautiful daughter, a college student, whom they had marked for attention last of all. They quickly got hold of her box of jewellery and forcing her down the train, proceeded towards the jungle. The girl was holding a book.

They went into a huddle, undecided whether to spare the girl's life or do away with her.

"Don't kill me," the girl said. "Convert me to Hinduism. I'm prepared to embrace your religion. I'm also willing to marry one of you. What good will it do you to kill me?"

"Yes, she's right," one of them said.

"But I know of a better way," another man said thrusting a dagger into her stomach. "And now back to the train. We have no time for idle gossip."

The girl lay writhing in agony on the carpet of grass and died a tortured death. Her book got soiled with her blood. The title of the book was *Socialism: Theory and Practice*, and the writer's name: John Strachey.

The girl must have been an intellectual, harbouring the desire to serve her country and its people. She was the central figure in nature's mystery and gave meaning to the creation of the world. But now her dead body lay in the jungle, to be preyed upon by jackals, crows and vultures.

I have returned to Bombay after a long time. I have been given a thorough wash and stalled in a shed. My compartments no longer reek of liquor or bear marks of blood. Nor do I hear the echoes of wild laughter. But as I stand there in the stillness of the night ghostly figures seem to come to life and the shrieks of the wounded dead fill the air. I would never go on such a horrible journey ever again. I only wish to pass through a land studded with barns of golden wheat, and swaying mustard plants on both sides of the track. I want to hear the peasants, a comingling of Hindus and Muslims, singing the love legends of Punjab while they sow the fields, their hearts brimming with love for each other, and reverence for women.

I am a lifeless train—a structure of wood and steel, shorn of any feelings. But even then I hate to carry a cargo of blood and flesh dripping with hatred. I will haul food grain to famine-stricken areas. I will carry coal, oil and iron ore to the mills and ploughs and fertilisers to the farmers. I will carry groups of prosperous peasants and happy workers in my carriages. The pious and simple women, secure in the love of their husbands, would cast loving glances at them and the children, their faces radiant like lotus in bloom, will not cower before death but greet the life to come with mounting confidence. Then there will be no Hindus and no Muslims. They will all be workers and human beings.

The Four-Anna Aunt

I was then a final year student in the Calcutta Medical College and had come to Lahore for a few days to attend my elder brother's wedding. We had our ancestral house in Thakurdas Lane near Shahi Mohalla and it was here that I met Aunt Eesri for the first time in my life.

Aunt Eesri was a distant relative of ours but we had such profound regard for her that all of us were eager to win her favour. When her *tonga* stopped outside our house, one of us looked out and shouted, "It's Aunt Eesri!"—and all of us, young and old, rushed out to receive her. Two of us helped her out of the *tonga*! She was a woman of formidable proportions and even the slightest exertion—a few words or the mere act of fixing her gaze on someone—left her out of breath. When we proceeded to pay off the *tongawala*, she smiled at us and said that she had already paid him. "How bad of you, auntie!" we protested. "You should have given us a chance." Her smile, breaking through her laboured breathing, was captivating. I immediately felt drawn towards her. Taking a hand-fan from the hand of a girl standing beside her, she started fanning herself and walked towards the house.

Aunt Eesri was past sixty. Her silvery hair lent grace to her full round, wheat-complexioned face. But what fascinated me most were her eyes. They made me think of the earth, of grainladen fields stretching for miles around and of deep flowing waters. For the love in those eyes was boundless, their simplicity fathomless and their suffering, without remedy.

They were remarkable eyes—the like of which I have never seen on any woman's face. Eyes, which attach no more importance to the bitterest experience of life than one does to a blade of grass; eyes, which carry everything before them in a torrential sweep. Eyes, strange, forgiving and full of compassion.

She was wearing a light green *ghagra* whose borders rippled with gold. Her silk *kameez* was yellow and her muslin *dupatta*, slate. She wore thick gold bracelets on her wrists.

News of her arrival went round as she entered the courtyard. Ladies of the house—daughters, daughters-in-law, aunts, ran

forward to touch her feet. Someone pushed forward a coloured *peerhi* for her to sit on. She smiled and sat down heavily on the *peerhi* and blessed all those present as she embraced them.

She had brought a papier mache basket with her which she carefully placed by her feet. Savitri, the maid servant Heero's daughter, beamed as she fanned the old lady. She gave a four-anna piece to each of those present as they came forward to receive her blessings. In twenty minutes she must have distributed more than a hundred coins from her basket. When all had been blessed she raised her eyes and looked at the girl who stood fanning her. "Who are you?" she asked.

"I am Savitri," replied the girl shyly.

"Savitri? Which Savitri? Oh, I see, you are Jaikishen's daughter, aren't you? I had completely forgotten you. Come, let me embrace you."

Aunt Eesri hugged the girl and kissed her on both her cheeks. When she took out a four-anna piece from the basket all the women present started tittering. Aunt Kartaro flashing her blue sapphire ring said, "Auntie, this girl is not Jaikishen's daughter. She is Savitri, the maid servant's daughter."

"Hai, I'm ruined!" Aunt Eesri looked agitated. "This girl has polluted me. I shall have to take a Ganga bath. I even kissed her." Her breath came sharp and short.

Puzzled, she looked at Savitri, who, reproved, had started crying. Aunt Eesri was moved. "Why are you crying?" she said folding the girl in her arms. "You are innocent, a *devi*, a virgin in whose pure heart God resides. I did not mean to hurt you. I must take a bath because my dharma enjoins it. Here, take another four annas "

Aunt Eesri had earned the nickname of "Four-anna Aunt". Some called her "Virgin Aunt". It was rumoured that since the day of their wedding uncle Yodhraj had no conjugal relations with her. People went so far as to say that before his marriage, uncle Yodhraj had so many affairs with beautiful girls of easy virtue that on the wedding night when he set his eyes on the plain village girl she failed to excite him. Though he did not ill-treat her and sent her seventy-five rupees every month, in other ways he had completely cut her out of his life. She lived in the village in her father-in-law's house. Uncle Yodhraj was a hardware merchant in Jullundur and did not go

to his village for years together. Aunt Eesri's parents came to fetch her several times but she refused to go with them. They even wanted to arrange another marriage for her but she spurned the idea.

When one sees an old woman, one often tries to figure out what she would have looked like in her youth. But nobody thought in this way about Aunt Eesri. They thought she must have looked like what she was now, right from her childhood—from the day of her birth. It was no wonder if at the time of her birth, she stretched out her hand and sweetly said to her mother, 'Mother, you must have undergone terrible birth-pangs because of me. Here, take this four-anna coin!'

Perhaps that was the reason why her relations with her husband were so peaceful. In our eyes, uncle Yodhraj was a complete rake; he drank and ran after women. That he was a prosperous iron merchant did not confer upon him the right to wreck his wife's life. But strangely enough, Aunt Eesri did not complain about the treatment she got from her husband. In fact, from her demeanour one got no inkling that there was something wrong with her life. We always found her smiling, ready to share other's joys and sorrows. The fixed amount of Rs. 75/- a month that she received from her husband she spent on helping the needy. Things were cheap and the money in those days went a long way. Not that people loved her for her money. There were times when she was completely broke. Even in her state of penury people loved her all the same; some even said that the privilege of touching her feet was itself a benediction.

Uncle Yodhraj was just the reverse of Aunt Eesri—he was wicked as she was saintly. For thirty years he left her to stay in the village with his parents. When his parents died other members of the family, as they grew up, drifted away one by one, to set up homes of their own, and uncle Yodhraj had reluctantly to bring Aunt Eesri to Jullundur. But she could not stay with him for long. Uncle Yodhraj tried to pay attentions to the girl of a respectable Pathan family of Pucca Bagh. Things became so hot for him that he had to pack up and flee to Lahore. The Pathans said that it was out of regard for Aunt Eesri that they had spared her husband's life. Coming to Lahore, uncle Yodhraj set up a new home in Mohalla Banjara. *Call it a*

quirk of Fate, uncle Yodhraj's business again flourished. No sooner he was on his feet he developed intimacy with Luxmi, a prostitute of Shahi Mohalla. In course of time he started staying with her and stopped visiting his own home altogether. But Aunt Eesri never harboured any resentment against him. It was in these days, when he was head over heels in love with Luxmi, and the scandal of his infatuation for this woman of ill repute had become the talk of the town, that my brother's marriage took place. Uncle Yodhraj, of course, did not attend the marriage, but Eesri was very much there. She looked after the guests day and night, with wholehearted devotion. Her cheerful disposition helped to unravel many complicated problems, and eased furrowed brows. Not that she had to make any special effort to soften ruffled tempers. Her face radiated joy, shedding happiness around her. Such was Aunt Eesri!

I never saw her talking ill of any one. Nor did I ever see her bemoaning her fate of giving herself up to dejection. Yes, once I saw her eyes shining with a strange light—and that was on the occasion of my brother's marriage. At five in the morning, when the marriage ceremony was over, the bride's people put the dowry on display in the big hall. In those days sofa sets had not come into vogue; people instead, gave coloured *peerhi* and large bedsteads, their legs studded with bright brass strips. My brother's father-in-law was an Executive Officer. He gave his daughter many new-fangled things in dowry including a sofa set. It was the first time, in our community, that any one had given a sofa set. It was a novelty to many, and women from other *mohallas* came to see these "Angrezi chairs". Aunt Eesri had not seen a sofa set before. She kept gazing at it in wonder. Three pieces—one long and two small ones. Lovingly, she ran her fingers over its soft covering and mumbled something to herself. At last, unable so hold back her curiosity, she asked me, "Son, why do they call these things sofa set?"

I just shook my head. I did not know how to answer her question.

"But why are two chairs smaller than the third?"

I had no answer for this, either. I again shook my head.

She stood pondering over the matter a long time. Then her face lit up. "I've got it," she said, "Shall I tell you?"

"Yes, Auntie."

"Well, listen," she said as if she were explaining something very subtle to school children. "When the husband and wife fall out they sit separately in these two small chairs. But when they have patched up they sit together on the bigger one. The English people are indeed a clever lot. No wonder they rule over us."

We laughed at Aunt's ingenious explanation. But I saw that Aunt had suddenly become grave. Was she reminded of her unhappy life with uncle Yodhraj? I don't know. But when I looked up at her, for a fleeting moment, her eyes shone with a strange light.

After doing my M.B. from Calcutta, I married a Bengali girl and set up as a doctor in Dharmtalla. I worked hard but my practice did not pick up. At my elder brother's insistence, I eventually came over to Lahore, where my brother helped me to set up my clinic at the corner of Thakurdas Lane. In Calcutta I was regarded as a fresh graduate, inexperienced in my job. But here, after a few years, when I had learnt the tricks of the trade, I was on the go. I was busy the whole day, and life, like a spindle, started revolving on a fixed axis leaving me hardly any time to call on relatives or friends. Consequently, I could not go to see Aunt Eesri for many years.

One day, surrounded by my patients, I was busy writing out prescriptions when a man from Mohalla Banjara pushed forward through the crowd of patients gathered around me.

"Come quickly, Doctor saheb!" he said. "Your aunt is dying."

I hurriedly hailed a *tonga* and drove to Aunt Eesri's house. Her house was at the far end of Mohalla Banjara. Climbing the stairs and past the iron landing, as I entered her dimly-lit room, I found her sitting propped up against bolsters. She was clutching her heart with her right hand and breathing heavily. Although she was parting, she smiled as she saw me. "Son, now that you have come, I know I am out of danger."

"What's the trouble, Auntie?"

"Nothing much, my son. It was death knocking at my door. For two days I had a raging fever. Then suddenly my body went cold." Aunt's pupils dilated as she explained her trouble. "First, my legs became numb. They were cold as ice. I pinched them, but they were lifeless. Then life slowly

ebbed away from my waist upwards. When my life started creeping towards my chest I firmly clutched my heart and shouted, 'Ho, someone hurry up and fetch Jaikishen's son, Radhakishen. He's the only who can bring my life back to me.' Now that you have come, I know I'll be saved."

She looked at me hopefully.

"Auntie, let me feel your pulse." I stretched out my hand towards her right arm.

"What kind of doctor are you?" she said jerking away my hand. "Can't you see I am gripping my life with this hand. How can I let you hold it?"

Aunt Eesri was well in a couple of weeks, and started going out as before, sharing in her neighbours' joys and sorrows. A few months after she had got well, uncle Yodhraj passed away at Luxmi's house in Shahi Mohalla; his heart had failed him. His bier was carried to the cremation ground from Luxmi's house. Auntie would not permit the dead body to be brought to his house in Mohalla Banjara. She did not accompany the bier to the cremation ground. Nor did she shed any tears. Undemonstratively, she broke up her gold bangles and changed into a white sari. Rubbing out the vermilion mark from her forehead she smeared it with ashes. Uncle's death made no difference in her daily ritual. In her white sari which went well with her silvery hair, she looked more imposing than ever before. Tongues wagged at her indifference towards the departed soul. Some among the relatives were pained at her strange behaviour. But so great was their respect for her that no one said anything to her face.

The years went by. I had by now a flourishing practice. Besides the one at Thakurdas Lane, I had also set up clinics at Karma Lane, inside the Shahlmi Gate and at the crossing of Wachhowali. In the mornings I was at Thakurdas Lane and the afternoons at Wachhowali. I was so swamped with work that I could only call at Aunt Eesri's at long intervals. Uncle Yodhraj had left all his money to Luxmi but he had bequeathed his property at Jullundur to Aunt Eesri which fetched her a rental of about Rs. 150/- a month. As before, she continued to live in Mohalla Banjara, busy as before in her daily rituals.

One day when I was returning after attending to a patient in Shahi Mohalla, I was suddenly reminded of Luxmi who lived

in that locality. From her, my thoughts leaped to Aunt Eesri whom I had not met for over a year. I cursed myself for not having visited her all this time and resolved to go to her house in a day or two as soon as I had some respite from work.

I was still thinking of her, when I suddenly saw her emerging from a lane of the Mohalla. She was wearing a black *ghagra,* devoid of any brocade work, and a white *kameez.* She had covered her head with a white muslin *dupatta* which framed her face like a nun's.

Our eyes met. Overcome by embarrassment she was about to turn back into the lane when I called out to her. My voice almost broke into a scream for I could not get over my surprise at seeing her emerging from the prostitute's quarters. "Aunt Eesri! Auntie!" I shouted.

She turned back and stood before me like a guilty thing, surprised. She could not look me in the face.

"What are you doing here, Auntie?" I said angrily.

"Son, you know . . . well," she said in a flattering tone. "I was told Luxmi is ill, seriously ill. I came to see her." She could not meet my eyes.

"You came here to see Luxmi? Luxmi, of all persons. That prostitute! That bitch, who . . ." I almost shouted.

Aunt Eesri slowly raised her hand, cutting short my outburst.

"Son, don't talk ill of her," she said. "Please don't." There were tears in her eyes. She sighed. "She was the last vestige of your uncle, the dear departed. Today she is also gone."

During the communal riots of 1947 we fled from Lahore and took refuge in Jullundur, in Aunt Eesri's house which was a spacious, two-storeyed affair. She had given the upper storey to her refugee relatives and herself lived in the lower one. Every morning she visited the refugee camps to render whatever help she could and sometimes returned with orphaned children. In about four months' time she had made a sizable "collection"—four boys and three girls. She had also permitted a few refugees to sleep and cook their food in the courtyard and the backyard. By and by, the house became a regular public rest house. But Aunt Eesri did not mind. She walked about in the house as if it was not hers, but of the refugees to whom she had given asylum. Women, generally have an acute

sense of possession. But not Aunt Eesri. Perhaps she had a blind spot so far as the question of property was concerned. All that she possessed was meant for others' use.

Since coming to Jullundur she had formed the habit of taking only one meal a day. Having lost everything in Lahore I felt annoyed at her queer habits. My *kothi* at Model Town was gone and I had no place to hide my head. I had no decent clothes to wear nor the means to provide myself with agreeable food. I ate what I got, and when I got it. During those days I developed bleeding piles. Being a doctor, I treated myself as be͵t as I could. But without proper care and dieting, which were not possible in the rough and tumble of a refugee's life my health deteriorated rapidly. For some time I tried to hide things from Aunt but she came to know. She came to me hurriedly, looking perturbed.

"Son, bleeding piles is a serious thing," she said. "Doctors have no cure for it. Take my advice and go to Gujranwala at once. I'll give you the fare. There, in Mohalla Suniaran lives Uncle Karimbux, a barber-surgeon. He has a nostrum, a sure cure for bleeding piles. Your uncle got the same trouble about twenty years ago. It took Uncle Karimbux just ten days to cure him."

Aunt's suggestion put my blood up. "I can't to Gujranwala."

"Why not? I'll give you money for the fare."

"I'm not worried about money. Gujranwala is now in Pakistan."

"So what? Can't one go there for treatment?"

"Auntie, you don't understand. Muslims have now separated from us. They have a country of their own, called Pakistan. Our counrry is known as Hindustan. Now people from Hindustan can't go to Pakistan nor can people from Pakistan come to Hindustan. They have to have a passport."

"A passport?" Aunt's forehead furrowed. "Does one have to go to the court for a passport?"

"Yes, that's the whole point." I said trying to dismiss the subject, finding it too subtle for this old woman's understanding.

"No, son, it doesn't behove one to go to the court. Respectable people never go to the court. But uncle Karimbux..."

"Karimbux be damned! You are talking of something that happened twenty years ago. That Karimbux of yours might be in the grave by this time. But you go on harping on his name."

Aunt left the room, weeping. I felt sorry for being so brusque with her, an innocent, well-meaning woman that she was. If she was not capable of understanding the complexities of present day world, surely, she was not to be blamed for it.

In fact, in those days I had become to irascible that I flew at a tangent at the slightest provocation. In college days I often talked of Revolution. Then came success and happiness in my life and with it a tense of smugness. The revolutionary ardour cooled down and gradually the word "Revolution" disappeared from my vocabulary. At Jullundur when I was again confronted with the seamy side of life, the revolutionary urge stirred within me. In the company of a few malcontents who like me had been uprooted from life, I started talking of "Inquilab."

These people assembled in my room on the first floor of Aunt Eesri's house. We gulped down cup after cup of tea, and talked of setting the world on fire. I would wave my clenched fist in the air and say: "They have given us a raw deal. We can't expect justice at the hands of the present rulers. Inquilab is on the way. It will storm through the country. Inquilab!"

One day Aunt came to my room, looking extremely worried. "Son, are the Muslims again coming?"

"No, Auntie. Who told you so?"

"What Inquilab were you talking of! Surely, Inquilab is a Muslim name."

We laughed.

"Auntie, the Inquilab we are talking about is neither a Muslim nor a Hindu. It belongs to all of us."

Aunt Eesri did not understand. "Carry on with your meeting," she said, mollified. "I'll bring you some tea."

Aunt sold off her 16-tola gold bracelets. With the money thus raised, I pushed on to Delhi, lock stock and barrel. Conditions at Jullundur were highly unsettled, hardly propitious for a sound medical practice. I started anew at Delhi in Karolbagh, which swarmed with refugees from Lahore, most of whom I knew. In a few years I began to make a handsome

income, built a house of my own, bought a car and came to be reckoned among the prominent people of the locality. I had again forgotten about Inquilab.

Last March, after thirteen years, I had occasion to visit Jullundur to attend a relative's marriage. During this long stretch of thirteen years I had almost forgotten the existence of Aunt Eesri. One remembers relatives only when one is in trouble. As I reached Jullundur I suddenly rememered Aunt Eesri. I remembered the gold bracelets which had helped me to stand on my own feet. I had never paid back the money. From the station I went straight to Aunt Eesri's house.

Dusk was descending over the street. The air was filled with smoke, the pungent smell of cooking oil and the shrill voice of children returning home. Aunt Eesri was alone in the house. Sitting in her room before the family deity, an earthen lamp with its wick dipped in *ghee*, resting in front of it, she was placing flowers at the feet of the deity. As she turned to come out of the sanctum she heard my footsteps and stepped back. "Who's it?" she called out.

"It's I!" I stepped forward and smiled.

She could not recognise me. Thirteen years is a long time. She had grown thin and feeble and she walked very slowly.

"I'm Radhakishen."

"Oh, Jaikishen's little boy?"

Her voice became thick with emotion. Had I walked up to her and held her hand she would have fallen. She clung to me and started crying. She kissed my cheeks, patted me on the head, her trembling fingers going all over my body. "Son, where have you been all this time? Have you forgotten your old Aunt?"

I felt thoroughly ashamed of myself and lowered my head. In spite of myself I stood tongue-tied. She sensed my discomfiture. Between breaths, her words came out with effort; "Is Saroj well?"

"Yes, Auntie."

"And the elder boy?"

"He's studying medicine."

"And the younger one?"

"He's in college."

"And Shanno and Bitto?"

"They too are studying in college. Kamla is now married."

"I've also got Savitri married off," she said. "Pooran is now at Roorkee. Nimmi and Binni have found their parents. They were restored to their families after six years. Their parents came to claim them. I hear from them from time to time. Only Gopi is with me now. Next year he'll also leave me to learn work at the Railway Workshop."

This was an account of Aunt's children whom she had "collected" during the riots and brought up as her own.

I scratched my chin sheepishly and said, "Auntie, I have yet to discharge your debt. I am ashamed of myself. I'll send the money, first thing on getting back to Delhi."

"What kind of debt?" Aunt looked at me, puzzled.

"Those bracelets, Auntie."

"Oh that! I remember it now." She smiled tenderly as she recalled the bracelets. Then she caressed my head and said: "Son, one should always discharge one's debt. This life itself is a debt. Did you come into this world on your own? No, you owe your existence to your parents, which means you are in debt to others for your life. If we do not repay our own debts how will the world go on? It will be the end of the word. That's why I say, I repaid your debt and you must in your turn, repay someone else's debt. The cycle must go on. It's our sacred duty." The long talk made Aunt breathless.

What could I say to Aunt? What can the shadow say to the light? "My strength is failing me," she said after a pause. "My hands and my feet are no good now. Otherwise I would have cooked a meal for you. Gopi will be here any moment. He'll prepare something for you. You must stay. I won't let you go without eating. Are you listening, son?"

"No Auntie, please don't bother," I said, my voice almost dropping to a whisper. "What I have in the world, I owe to you. I came to attend Tejpal's wedding and came straight to your house from the station. I must go back now to join the wedding party."

"Oh, yes," she said. Her eyes momentarilyl it up. "They invited me also. But I am unwell for the last two days. I won't be able to go. I've sent them a wedding present. Please give my blessings to Tejpal."

"Certainly, Auntie." I bent down to touch her feet. Blessing me profusely, she clasped me to her bosom. "Son, will you do one thing for me?" she said suddenly, as I returned to go.

"Yes, Auntie?"

"Can you come tomorrow? Say, some time in the morning, I want to see you."

"Why Auntie," I said, "aren't you seeing me now?"

"My eyesight is very bad. I can't see clearly at night. If you come in the day time I could have a good look at you, son. I have not seen you for the last thirteen years."

My eyes brimmed with tears. "I'll certainly come, Auntie," I said, my voice tremulous with emotion.

Next morning some more members of the wedding party were due to arrive and I went to the station alongwith others to receive them. On our way back, I remembered my promise to Aunt Eesri and decided to go to her house. At the turning of the lane where her house was, I saw people in twos and threes standing there silently with bowed heads. Sensing some mishap, I hurried towards the house. I met more people on the ground floor of her house. They were all crying. Aunt Eesri was no more. She had died in the morning while I was at the station.

Her dead body was lying on the floor of her inner room, wrapped in a white sheet. Her face was uncovered. The room was filled with the odour of burning camphor and joss sticks. Sitting by her side, a Pandit was chanting *mantras*.

Aunt Eesri's eyes were closed, her child-like face, ashen. But what a face! It had a touch of eternity about it, peaceful and fathomless like dreams which made it look, not like the face of Aunt Eesri, but of Mother Earth herself, eternal and vast, in whose eyes ran the rivers of the world, in whose lap were snuggled thousands of valleys, hugging clusters of teeming people to their bosom. Life-giving and smiling valleys, from which rose the fragrance of selfless love.

I was standing at her feet gazing at her face, when some one put his hand on my shoulder. I turned round to look. It was a young man of twenty or so, his eyes swollen with weeping. "I am Gopi Nath," he said softly I knew who he was. But I did not know what to say.

"I went to Tejpal's house to call you," he said. "You had left for the railway station."

I remained silent.

"Auntie asked for you several times in the morning. She was expecting you. She waited for you till her last breath. At last, when she realised that her time had come, she asked me to give this to you. "Give this to my son, Radhakishen," she said.

Gopi Nath stretched out his hand and placed a four-anna piece on my upturned palm.

Aunt Eesri is gone. I do not know where she is today. But if she is in heaven, I am sure she must be sitting on her coloured *peerhi*, the papier mache basket placed by her feet, from which she must be handing out four-anna coins to the gods and patting their heads.

—Translated by Jai Ratan

MULK RAJ ANAND

The Parrot in the Cage

'*Rukmaniai ni Rukmaniai*!' the parrot in the cage called in the way Rukmani's friends used to call her when they entered the alleyway of Kucha Chabuk Swaran in Lahore. And he repeated the call even before she could answer him, as she was wont to do when she wanted to humour the bird. She did not answer but sat crouching on the fringe of the road about half a furlong away from the Amritsar court.

'*Rukmaniai ni Rukmaniai*!' the parrat called again.

She was peering through the little clouds of dust raised by the passing motors and *tongas* and *yekkas* in the direction from which, she had been told by the roasted gram stall keeper, the 'Dipti Collator' was to come, and she remained heedless to the parrot's cry.

'*Rukmaniai ni Rukmaniai*!' the parrot called shrilly and went on repeating the cry with sure mocking bird's instinct that if he kept on calling her she would answer.

'*Han*, my son, *han*...' the old woman said after all, wearily. There had been a dull ache behind the small knot of hair on the back of her head, and, now, with the mounting heat of the June morning, it seemed to her like the rumblings of the dreadful night when murder and fire had raged in her lane.

Little rivulets of sweat trickled through the deep fissures of old age which lined her face and she shaded her eyes with the inverted palm of her hand, to probe the sunlight more surely for the vision of the Deputy Commissioner. Her contracted toothless mouth was open and a couple of flies came from the direction in which she looked and settled on the corners of her lips.

She waved her left hand gingerly to scatter the flies. But they persisted and set up an irritation in her soul through which she felt a panic sieze her belly.

'*Ni tun kithe hain*?' the parrot cried another cry which he had learnt from the old woman's friends who invariably asked on entering the lane, 'Where are you?' For she used to be away earning her living as a maid of all work, cleaning utensils

for the people in the bigger houses in the lane, or was mostly hidden from view in the inner sanctums of the dark ground floor by the well in the gulley.

'Son, I don't know where I am . . . ' she said listlessly, in the effort to keep the parrot quiet by assuring him she was taking notice of him. 'I only know that if Fatto had not given in her *burqah* to escape with, I should not be here . . . '

'*Ni tun ki karni hain ?*' the parrot persisted with the third call which Rukmani's friends used to call.

'Nothing, son, I am doing nothing . . . only waiting . . .' the old woman said tiredly, as though now she was holding a metaphorical conversation with her pet to keep her mind occupied. For, from her entrails arose a confusion which was like the panic she had felt at the mad throats bursting with shouts of Allah-o-Akbar!', ' Har-Har Mahadev!', 'Sat-Sri Akal!' on the night of terror when she had fled from the lane.

There had been flashes of blazing light; cracking of burning house-beams; smoke, smoke, choking smoke . . . And she had thought that her last days had come, that the earth itself was troubled through the misdeeds of the Kaliyug, and that, soon, the *dharti* would open up and swallow everything . . . And then Fate had come and told her she would be murdered if she did not leave.

'*Ni tun ki karni hain?*' the parrot repeated. '*Ni tun kithe hain?* . . . '

'Nothing, son, nothing,' Rukmani answered. 'And I don't know where I am . . . ' And she looked steadily towards the junction of the Mall Road and Kutchery Road and saw no sign of the Deputy Commissioner, her last phrase seemed to get meaning.

'*Rukmaniai ni Rukmaniai!*' the parrot called again.

Her answers to his metallic shrill nasal cries did not irritate her anymore, but relieved the heavy pressure of the demons of the dreadful night on her head and her chest and her bowels.

'*Ni tun ki karni hain?*' the parrot persisted.

'Son, I am waiting for the Sahib, so that he can give me some money to buy bread with . . . They say that the Congress Sarkar will give back what we have lost, son, they say—I heard at the satation, son, at the satation! . . . Are you hungry, my son?

—you must be hungry... I shall buy you some gram from that stall keeper when the Sahib gives me money...'

'Mai, you are dreaming! You have gone mad!' the gram stall keeper said. 'Go, go your way to the town, you may get some food at the Durbar Sahib temple. You wo'nt get anything from the Dipty Collator...'

'*Vay jaja*, eater of your masters!' she shouted bitterly. Such common sense as that of the complacent gram seller seemed to break the pitcher of her hopes. And she mooed like a cow in defiance at the end of her speech.

'Acha, don't abuse me. I only said this for your own good,' the stall keeper answered, as he whisked the flies off his stall with the end of a dirty apron.

'Oh, why did I leave home to wander like this from door to door!' old Rukmani whined almost under her breath. 'Oh, why did you have to turn me out of my room in my old age, God'... Oh why... Why didn't I tied the rupees I had earned in a knot on my *dupatta*!... *Hai Rabba*!...'

She moaned to herself, and tremors of tenderness went swirling through her flesh. And tears filled her eyes. And in the hazy dust before her the violent rhythms of the terrors of falling houses and dying, groaning men and heavy, shouting men, danced in macabre trembling waves of sunlight, dim and unsubstantial like the ghosts on a cremation ground before whom she had always cowered every time she had attended a funeral.

'*Rukmaniai ni Rukmaniai!*' the parrot called and brought her to herself.

Crackling flames of heat now assailed her. And she sweated more profusely. And yet she crouched where she was only shuffling like a hen sitting over her eggs.

'At least go and sit under the shade of the tree,' the gramseller said.

The pupils of her eyes were blistering with the glare. She wiped her face with the end of her *dupatta* and heaved as though she was lifting the weight of a century's miseries up with her. Then she took the handle of the iron cage in which her pet parrot sat and bent-backed but staring ahead, she ambled up to a spot where the precarious shadows of a *kikar* tree lay on the rutted earth.

'*Ni tun kithe hain*? *ni* . . . ,' the parrot's monologue continued. She did herself communings, aroused by the anonymous, mean-ingless, repetitive calls: 'Nowhere, son, nothing, nothing . . .'

She had hardly settled down when suddenly a motor whirred past, with a motor cyclist ahead and some policemen in a jeep behind, scattering much dust on the fringe of the roadside.

'There goes your Dipty Collator said the gram, seller.

'*Hai hai*! Come my son!' she screamed as she shot up with great alacrity and picked up the cage in her hand. 'Come, I will join my hands to the Sahib and fall at his feet.'

'Mad woman!' the gramseller said cynically.

She heeded him not, but penetrated the clouds of dust.

Behind her, and on all sides, she could hear the sound of rushing feet storming towards the gloomy gates of the kutchery. And their cries whirled in the air, 'Hujoor, Mai Bap, hear us!' Sarkar! Dipty Sahab! . . . We have come on foot all the way from Lahore . . . You . . .' She nearly fell as the more powerful men among the crowd brushed past her and their own women.

'Rukmaniai! *Tun kithe hain*?' the parrot in the cage cried even as he fluttered his wings in a panic at the voices and the hurtling feet.

The old woman did not answer but sped grimly on. Only, in a moment the dust-storm which was proceeding towards the court was turned back by a furious whirlwind from the oppo-site direction. A posse of policemen charged the refugees with *lathis* and angry shouts which drowned the chorus of voice of which Rukmani's sighs and her parrot's cries had been a part.

In the delirium of motion which was set afoot by the *lathi*-charge of the police, all valour was held at bay and turned back.

Rukmani was brushed aside by some desperate arm, until she reeled and fell, not far from where she had sat waiting for the Sahib. But she clung to the handle of the cage in which her parrot sat as she lay moaning in suppressed, helpless whispers.

The parrot fluttering furiously as though he was being strangled called out shrilly:

'Rukmaniai. . . *Ni Rukmaniai! Ni tun kithe hain*! . . . *Ni tun ki karani hain!*'

But the old woman, though concerned for him had turned

in upon herself with a sudden dimness that seemed to be creeping upon her.

After the crowd had been cleared, and the dust settled, the seller was irritated by the parrot's constant cries into stirring from his perch. He was afraid that the old woman had expired. But as he came near her, the parrot called her more shrilly and she answered faintly, '*Han, han*, son, *han*,' and the man knew that she was still alive. He lifted her up and found that she was slightly grazed.

'Come and sit in the shade, mother!' he said.

'Acha, son, acha!' she moaned.

And she lifted the cage and proceeded towards the shade.

The parrot was a little reassured as he saw the gramseller helping his mistress and he shrieked less shrilly.

'Come, my little winged one, I shall give you some gram to eat,' the gramseller said to him.

'May you live long, son!' the old woman blessed the gramseller in a feeble, strained, moanful voice.

'*Rukmaniai ni Rukmaniai! Tun kithe hain? Tun ki karani hain?*' the parrot called now in a slow measured voice.

'*Han han*, son, *han* my son . . . I don't know where I am! I don't know . . .'

—English Short Story

KHWAJA AHMAD ABBAS

A Debt To Pay

My name is Shaikh Burhanuddin.

When violence and murder became the order of the day in Delhi and the blood of Muslims flowed in the streets, I cursed my fate for having a Sikh for a neighbour. Far from expecting him to come to my rescue in times of trouble, as a good neighbour should, I could not tell when he would thrust his *kirpan* into my belly. The truth is that till then I used to find the Sikhs somewhat laughable. But I also disliked them and was somewhat scared of them.

My hatred for the Sikhs began on the day when I first set my eyes on one. I could not have been more than six years old when I saw a Sikh sitting out in the sun combing his long hair. "Look!" I yelled with revulsion, "a woman with a long beard!" As I got older this dislike developed into hatred for the entire race.

It was a custom amongst old women of our household to heap all afflictions on our enemies. Thus for example if a child got pneumonia or broke its leg, they would say, "A long time ago a Sikh, (or an Englishman), got pneumonia; or, a long time ago a Sikh, (or an Englishman), broke his leg." When I was older I discovered that this referred to the year 1857 when the Sikh princes helped the *Ferringhee* foreigner to defeat the Hindus and Muslims in the war of independence. I do not wish to propound a historical thesis but to explain the obsession, the suspicion and hatred which I bore towards the English and the Sikhs. I was more frightened of the English than of the Sikhs.

When I was ten years old, I happened to be travelling from Delhi to Aligarh. I used to travel third class, or at the most in the intermediate class. That day I said to myself, "Let me for once travel second class and see what it feels like." I bought my ticket and I found an empty second class compartment. I jumped on the well-sprung seats; I went into the bathroom and leapt up to see my face in the mirror; I switched

on all the fans. I played with the light switches. There were only a couple of minutes for the train to leave when four red-faced "tommies" burst into the compartment, mouthing obscenities: everything was either "bloody" or "damn". I had one look at them and my desire to travel second class vanished.

I picked up my suitcase and ran out. I only stopped for breath when I got into a third class compartment crammed with natives. But as luck would have it, it was full of Sikhs—their beards hanging down to their navels and dressed in nothing more than their underpants. I could not escape from them, but I kept my distance.

Although I feared the white man more than the Sikhs, I felt that he was more civilised: he wore the same kind of clothes as I. I also wanted to be able to say "damn", "bloody fool"--the way he did. And like him I wanted to belong to the ruling class. The Englishman ate his food with forks and knives, I also wanted to learn to eat with forks and knives so that natives would look upon me as advanced and as civilised as the white man.

My Sikh-phobia was of a different kind. I had contempt for the Sikh. I was amazed at the stupidity of men who imitated women and grew their hair long. I must confess I did not like my hair cut too short; despite my father's instructions to the contrary, I did not allow the barber to clip off more than a little when I went to him on Fridays. I grew a mop of hair so that when I played hockey or football it would blow about in the breeze like those of English sportsmen. My father often asked me, "Why do you let your hair grow like a woman's?" My father had primitive ideas and I took no notice of his views. If he had his way he would have had all heads razored bald, and stuck artificial beards on people's chins . . . That reminds me that the second reason for hating the Sikhs was their beards which made them look like savages.

There are beards and beards. There was my father's beard, neatly trimmed in the French style; or my uncle's which went into a sharp point under his chin. But what could you do with a beard to which no scissor was ever applied and which was allowed to grow like a wild bush—fed with a compost of oil, curd and goodness knows what! And, after it had grown a few feet, combed like hair on a woman's head. My grandfather

also had a very long beard which he combed... but then my grandfather was my grandfather and a Sikh is just a Sikh.

After I had passed my matriculation examination I was sent to the Muslim University at Aligarh. We boys who came from Delhi, or the United Provinces, looked down upon boys from the Punjab; they were crude rustics who did not know how to converse, how to behave at table, or to deport themselves in polite company. All they could do was to drink large tumblers of buttermilk. Delicacies such as vermicelli with essence of *kewra* sprinkled on it, or the aroma of Lipton's tea was alien to them. Their language was unsophisticated to the extreme, whenever they spoke to each other it seemed as if they were quarrelling. It was full of "*ussi, tussi, saadey, twhaadey*",—Heaven forbid! I kept my distance from the Punjabis.

But the warden of our hostel (God forgive him) gave me a Punjabi as a room mate. When I realised that there was no escape, I decided to make the best of a bad bargain and be civil to the chap. After a few days we became quite friendly. This man was called Ghulam Rasul and he was from Rawalpindi. He was full of amusing anecdotes and was a good companion.

You might well ask how Mr. Ghulam Rasul gatecrashed into a story about the Sikhs. The fact of the matter is that Ghulam Rasul's anecdotes were usually about the Sikhs. It is through these anecdotes that I got to know the racial characteristics, the habits and customs of this strange community. According to Ghulam Rasul the chief characteristics of the Sikhs were the following:

All Sikhs were stupid and idiotic. At noon-time they lost their senses altogether. There were many instances to prove this. For example, one day at 12 o'clock noon, a Sikh was cycling along Hall Bazaar in Amritsar when a constable, also a Sikh, s topped him and demanded, "Where is your light?" The cyclist replied nervously, "Jemadar Sahib, I lit it when I left my home; it must have gone out just now." The constable threatened to run him in. A passer-by, yet another Sikh with a long white beard, intervened, "Brothers, there is no point in quarrelling over little things. If the light has gone out it can be lit again."

Ghulam Rasul knew hundreds of anecdotes of this kind. When he told them in his Punjabi accent his audience was left

helpless with laughther. One really enjoyed them best in Punjabi because the strange and incomprehensible behaviour of the uncouth Sikh was best told in his rustic lingo.

The Sikhs were not only stupid but incredibly filthy as well. Ghulam Rasul, who had known hundreds of them, told us how they never shaved their heads. And whereas we Muslims washed our hair thoroughly at least every Friday, the Sikhs who made a public exhibition of bathing in their underpants, poured all kinds of filth, like curds into their hair. I rub lime-juice and glycerine in my scalp. Although the glycerine is white and thick like curd, it is an altogether different thing—made by a well-known firm of perfumers of Europe. My glycerine came in a lovely bottle whereas the Sikhs' curd came from the shop of a dirty sweetmeat seller.

I would not have concerned myself with the manner of living of these people except that they were so haughty and ill-bred as to consider themselves as good warriors as the Muslims. It is known over the world that one Muslim can get the better of ten Hindus or Sikhs. But these Sikhs would not accept the superiority of the Muslims and would strut about like bantam cocks twirling their moustaches and stroking their beards. Ghulam Rasul used to say that one day we Muslims would teach the Sikhs a lesson that they would never forget.

Years went by.

I left college. I ceased to be a student and became a clerk; then a head clerk. I left Aligarh and came to live in New Delhi. I was allotted government quarters. I got married. I had children.

The quarters next to mine were occupied by a Sikh who had been displaced from Rawalpindi. Despite the passage of years, I remembered what Ghulam Rasul had told me. As Ghulam Rasul had prophesied, the Sikhs had been taught a bitter lesson in humility at least, in the district of Rawalpindi. The Muslims had virtually wiped them out. The Sikhs boasted that they were great heroes; they flaunted their long *kirpans*. But they could not withstand the brave Muslims. The Sikhs' beards were forcibly shaved. They were circumcised. They were converted to Islam. The Hindu press, as was its custom, vilified the Muslims. It reported that the Muslims had murdered Sikh

women and children. This was wholly contrary to Islamic tradition. No Muslim warrior was ever known to raise his hand against a woman or a child. The pictures of the corpses of women and children published in Hindu newspapers were obviously fake. I wouldn't have put it beyond the Sikhs to murder their own women and children in order to vilify the Muslims.

The Muslims were also accused of abducting Hindu and Sikh women. The truth of the matter is that such was the impact of the heroism of Muslims on the minds of Hindu and Sikh girls that they fell in love with young Muslims and insisted on going with them. These noble-minded young men had no option but to give them shelter and thus bring them to the true path of Islam. The bubble of Sikh bravery was burst. It did not matter how their leaders threatened the Muslims with their *kirpans*, the sight of the Sikhs who had fled from Rawalpindi filled my heart with pride in the greatness of Islam.

The Sikh who was my neighbour was about sixty years old. His beard had gone completely grey. Although he had barely escaped from the jaws of death, he was always laughing, displaying his teeth in the most vulgar fashion. It was evident that he was quite stupid. In the beginning he tried to draw me into his net by professions of friendship. Whenever I passed him he insisted on talking to me. I do not remember what kind of Sikh festival it was, when he sent me some sweet butter. My wife promptly gave it away to the sweeperess. I did my best to have as little to do with him as I could. I snubbed him whenever I could. I knew that if I spoke a few words to him, he would be hard to shake off. Civil talk would encourage him to become familiar. It was known to me that Sikhs drew their sustenance from foul language. Why shoud I soil my lips by associating with such people!

One Sunday afternoon I was telling my wife of some anecdotes about the stupidity of the Sikhs. To prove my point, exactly at 12 o'clock, I sent my servant across to my Sikh neighbour to ask him the time. He sent back the reply, "Two minutes after 12." I remarked to my wife, "You see, they are scared of even mentioning 12 o'clock!" We both had a hearty laugh. After this, many a time when I wanted to make an ass of my Sikh neighbour, I would ask him. "Well, Sardarji, has it

struck twelve?" The shameless creature would grin, baring all his teeth and answer, "Sir, for us it is always striking twelve." He would roar with laughter as if it were a great joke.

I was concerned about the safety of my children. One could never trust a Sikh. And this man had fled from Rawalpindi. He was sure to have a grudge against Muslims and to be on the look-out for an opportunity to avenge himself. I had told my wife never to allow the children to go near the Sikh's quarters. But children are children. After a few days I saw my children playing with the Sikh's little girl, Mohini, and his other grandchildren. This child, who was barely ten years old, was really as beautiful as her name indicated; she was fair and beautifully formed. These wretches have beautiful women. I recall Ghulam Rasul telling me that if all the Sikh men were to leave their women behind and clear out of the Punjab, there would be no need for Muslims to go to paradise in search of houris.

The truth about the Sikhs was soon evident. After the thrashing in Rawalpindi, they fled like cowards to East Punjab. Here they found the Muslims weak and unprepared. So they began to kill them. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims were martyred; the blood of the faithful ran in streams. Thousands of women were stripped naked and made to parade through the streets. When Sikhs, fleeing from Western Punjab, came in large numbers to Delhi, it was evident that there would be trouble in the capital. I could not leave for Pakistan immediately. Consequently I sent away my wife and children by air with my elder brother, and entrusted my own fate to God. I could not send much luggage by air. I booked an entire railway wagon to take my furniture and belongings. But on the day I was to load the wagon I got information that trains bound for Pakistan were being attacked by Sikh bands. Consequently my luggage stayed in my quarters in Delhi.

On the 15th of August, India celebrated its independence. What interest could I have in the independence of India! I spent the day lying in bed reading "Dawn" and the "Pakistan Times". Both the papers had strong words to say about the manner in which India had gained its freedom and proved conclusively how the Hindus and the British had conspired to destroy the Muslims. It was only our leader, the great Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who was able to thwart their evil designs

and win Pakistan for the Muslims. The English had knuckled under because of Hindu and Sikh pressure and handed over Amritsar to India. Amritsar, as the world knows, is a purely Muslim city. Its famous Golden Mosque—or am I mixing it up with the Golden Temple!—yes of course, the Golden Mosque is in Delhi. And in Delhi besides the Golden Mosque there are the Jama Masjid, the Red Fort, the mausolea of Nizamuddin and Emperor Humayun, the tomb and school of Safdar Jang—just everything worthwhile bears imprints of Islamic rule. Even so this Delhi (which should really be called after its Muslim builder Shahjahan as Shahjahanabad) was to suffer the indignity of having the flag of Hindu imperialism unfurled on its ramparts.

My heart seemed rent asunder. I could have shed tears of blood. My cup of sorrow was full to the brim when I realised that Delhi, which was once the footstool of the Muslim Empire, the centre of Islamic culture and civilisation, had been snatched out of our hands. Instead we were to have the desert wastes of Western Punjab, Sind and Baluchistan inhabited by an uncouth and uncultured people. We were to go to a land where people do not know how to talk in civilised Urdu; where men wear baggy *salwars* like their womenfolk, where they eat thick bread four pounds in weight instead of the delicate wafers we eat at home!

I steeled myself. I would have to make this sacrifice for my great leader, Jinnah, and for my new country, Pakistan. Nevertheless the thought of having to leave Delhi was most depressing.

When I emerged from my room in the evening, my Sikh neighbour bared his fangs and asked, "Brother, did you not go out to see the celebrations?" I felt like setting fire to his beard.

One morning the news spread of a general massacre in old Delhi. Muslim homes were burnt in Karol Bagh. Muslim shops in Chandni Chowk were looted. This then was a sample of Hindu rule! I said to myself, 'New Delhi is really an English city; Lord Mountbatten lives here as well as the Commander-in-Chief. At least in New Delhi no hand will be raised against Muslims.' "With this self assurance I started towards my office. I had to settle the business of provident fund; I had delayed going to Pakistan in order to do so. I had only got as far as

Gole Market when I ran into a Hindu colleague in the office. He said, "What on earth are you up to? Go back at once and do not come out of your house. The rioters are killing Muslims in Connaught Circus." I hurried back home.

I had barely got to my quarters when I ran into my Sikh neighbour. He began to reassure me. "Sheikhji, do not worry! As long as I am alive no one will raise a hand against you." I said to myself: 'How much fraud is hidden behind this man's beard! He is obviously pleased that the Muslims are being massacred, but expresses sympathy to win my confidence; or is he trying to taunt me?' I was the only Muslim living in that block, perhaps I was the only one on that road.

I did not want these people's kindness or sympathy. I went inside my quarter and said to myself, 'If I have to die, I will kill at least ten or twenty men before they get me.' I went to my room where beneath my bed I kept my double-barrelled gun. I had also collected quite a hoard of cartridges.

I searched the house, but could not find the gun.

"What is *huzoor* looking for?" asked my faithful servant, Mohammed.

"What happened to my gun?"

He did not answer. But I could tell from the way he looked that he had either hidden it or stolen it.

"Why don't you answer?" I asked him angrily.

Then he came out with the truth. He had stolen my gun and given it to some of his friends who were collecting arms to defend the Muslims in Daryaganj.

"We have hundreds of guns, several machine guns, ten revolvers and a cannon. We will slaughter these infidels; we will roast them alive."

"No doubt with my gun you will roast the infidels in Daryaganj, but who will defend me here? I am the only Mussalman amongst these savages. If I am murdered, who will answer for it?"

I persuaded him to steal his way to Daryaganj to bring back my gun and a couple of hundred cartridges. When he left I was convinced that I would never see him again.

I was all alone. On the mantlepiece was a family photograph. My wife and children stared silently at me. My eyes filled with tears at the thought that I would never see them

again. I was comforted with the thought that they were safe in Pakistan. Why had I been tempted by my paltry provident fund and not gone with them? I heard the crowd yelling.

"Sat-Sri Akal..."

"Har-Har Mahadev..."

The yelling came closer and closer. They were rioters—the bearers of my death warrant. I was like a wounded deer running hither and thither, with the hunters' hounds in full pursuit. There was no escape. The door was made of very thin wood and glass panes. The rioters would smash their way in.

"Sat-Sri Akal..."

"Har-Har Mahadev..."

They were coming closer and closer; death was coming closer and closer. Suddenly there was a knock at the door. My Sikh neighbour walked in—"Sheikhji, come into my quarters at once." Without a second thought I ran into the Sikh's verandah and hid behind the columns. A shot hit the wall above my head. A truck drew up and about a dozen young men climbed down. Their leader had a list in his hand—"Quarter No. 8—Sheikh Burhanuddin". He read my name and ordered his gang to go ahead. They invaded my quarter and under my very eyes proceeded to destroy my home. My furniture, boxes, pictures, books, druggets and carpets, even the dirty linen was carried into the truck. Robbers! Thugs! Cut-throats!

As for the Sikh, who had pretended to sympathise with me, he was no less a robber than they! He was pleading with the rioters: "Gentlemen, stop! We have a prior claim over our neighbour's property. We must get our share of the loot." He beckoned to his sons and daughters. All of them gathered to pick up whatever they could lay their hands on. One took my trousers; another a suitcase. They even grabbed the family photograph. They took the loot to their quarters.

You bloody Sikh! If God grants me life I will settle my score with you. At this moment I cannot even protest. The rioters are armed and only a few yards away from me. If they get to know of my presence...

"Please come in."

My eyes fell on the unsheathed *kirpan* in the hands of the Sikh. He was inviting me to come in. The bearded monster

looked more frightful after he had soiled his hands with my property. There was the glittering blade of his *kirpan* inviting me to my doom. There was no time to argue. The only choice was between the guns of the rioters and the sabre of the Sikh. I decided, rather the *kirpan* of the old man than ten armed gangsters. I went into the room hesitantly, silently.

"Not here, come in further." I went into the inner room like a goat following a butcher. The glint of the blade of the *kirpan* was almost blinding.

"Here you are, take your things," said the Sikh.

He and his children put all the stuff they had pretended to loot, in front of me. His old woman said, "Son, I am sorry we were not able to save more."

I was dumbfounded.

The gangsters had dragged out my steel almirah and were trying to smash it open. "It would be simpler if we could find the keys," said someone.

"The keys can only be found in Pakistan. That cowardly son of a filthy Muslim has decamped," replied another.

Little Mohini answered back: "Sheikhji is not a coward. He has not run off to Pakistan."

"Where is he blackening his face?"

"Why should he be blackening his face? He is in . . ."

Mohini realised her mistake and stopped in her sentence. Blood mounted in her father's face. He locked me in the inside room, gave his *kirpan* to his son and went out to face the mob.

I do not know what *exactly* took place outside. I heard the sound of blows; then Mohini crying; then the Sikh yelling full-blooded abuse in Punjabi. And then a shot and the Sikh's cry of pain "Hai".

I heard a truck engine starting up; and then there was a petrified silence.

When I was taken out of my prison my Sikh neighbour was lying on a charpoy. Beside him lay a torn and bloodstained shirt. His new shirt also was oozing with blood. His son had gone to telephone for the doctor.

"Sardarji, what have you done?" I do not know how these words came out of my lips. The world of hate in which I had lived all these years, lay in ruins about me.

"Sardarji, why did you do this?" I asked him again.

"Son, I had a debt to pay."

"What kind of a debt?"

"In Rawalpindi there was a Muslim like you who sacrificed his life to save mine and the honour of my family."

"What was his name, Sardarji?"

"Ghulam Rasul."

Fate had played a cruel trick on me. The clock on the wall started to strike . . . 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . 4 . . . 5 . . . The Sikh turned towards the clock and smiled. He reminded me of my grandfather with his twelve-inch beard. How closely the two resembled each other!

. . . 6 . . . 7 . . . 8 . . . 9 . . . we counted in silence.

He smiled again. His white beard and long white hair were like a halo, effulgent with a divine light . . . 10 . . . 11 . . . 12 . . . The clock stopped striking.

I could almost hear him say: "For us Sikhs, it is always 12 o'clock!"

But the bearded lips, still smiling, were silent. And I knew he was already in some distant world, where the striking of clocks counted for nothing, where violence and mockery were powerless to hurt him.

—Urdu short story
Translated by Khushwant Singh

ANNADA SANKAR RAY

Dividing the Water

When he heard his friend was ill Adhirath came to see him.

"I'm told Dada is sick, Boudi. What's the matter?" he asked his friend's wife.

"Fever. Slow nagging fever. His temperature is not high but every now and then he cries out. When you go into his room you'll hear for yourself what he says. But don't stay long and don't let him talk much. The doctor has given strict orders."

The sick man was lying with his eyes closed. He opened them at the sound of footsteps and asked:

"Who is it? Adhirath? Don't fret. Pomfret." Adhirath thought he was delirious but when he ran his hand over his friend's forehead he found it fairly cool. Could delirium be produced by a temperature so mild?

"How are you feeling, Dada? Your temperature doesn't seem to be very high." Adhirath spoke.

"Low fewer. Won't go away. Keeps coming back. That's what worries me. But what good does it do to worry? Don't fret. Pomfret."

"You'll be well again in no time," Adhirath was reassuring.

"Of course. Of course. That's why I say, Don't fret. Pomfret."

"What does that mean?" Adhirath was puzzled.

"Why? It's plain enough. Who doesn't know what to fret means? And in case you don't know what pomfret is I advise you to taste it. It's a delicious sea food."

"I know. I've tried it. It's good fish. But why should I stop fretting and dine on pomfret? There're lots of other kinds of fish," Adhirath protested

"Away with you. It's a sort of *mantra*! Can't you see that? Stupid!"

"*Mantras* are usually coherent. Is this one like *hing! ching! chat!*? That one's not." Adhirath was curious.

"Pomfret is the name of a launch," Dada said in explanation, sitting up and leaning back against his pillows. "It's a sea-going launch. The Pomfret is something I shall never forget. I remember it whenever I find myself lost at sea or out of sight of shore. It gives me the courage to hope I'll be rescued as miraculously as the Pomfret was. What good does it do to worry? Don't fret. Pomfret."

"What good does it to worry when nobody's left to call a Bengali in the country known as Bangla Desh?" Adhirath spoke emotionally. "Those who were Bengalis are either dead or they've fled. I'm told millions are on the point of ending their lives by starvation."

"Don't fret. Pomfret," was the only comment Dada made. "There's an end to everything, even despair."

"Despair?" Adhirath said sadly. "How can we do anything but despair when only criminals and cowards are left! Is there a man among them?"

"Don't fret. Pomfret. Don't give up. Keep your courage up." Dada tried to comfort him.

"Where are we to turn?" Adhirath exclaimed, "Delhi is rotten with bribery. There's flattery at every step. It's full of sycophants. Some offer liberal libations at the feet of the local deities and others throw down their money. Delhi is once more what it was during the last days of the Moghuls."

"Don't fret. Pomfret." Dada lay down again. It was obvious that he had been pained. Would his temperature shoot up?

"First things first, Dada. Get well." Adhirath was concerned, "I'll come next week. I'd like to hear about the Pomfret. You can tell me then."

"A lot of big fish are circulating rumours of what's cooking in Delhi's pots without getting a scratch. I'm just a minnow. But if I tell you everything that happened to the Pomfret some official secrets may be disclosed. In a time of historical crisis I was given a role of some importance to play."

Dada sank back, exhausted.

Some days later he told Adhirath the Pomfret story.

II

Nineteen forty-six, forty-seven and forty-eight! They were three years without a parallel in our lives. I had resigned myself to being only a spectator, nothing more than witness of the events that were taking place. I had no part to play. But one day towards the end of forty-seven a telephone call for me came. I was being sent to administer the border district of Fateyabad.

"Please don't say no. There's nobody else we can send."

Fateyabad had always been a peaceful place and so was Nandiya, its neighbour. Acrose the river was Rani Mahal. It was also quiet and peaceful. But a line had been drawn between them, cutting them off from each other, marking a new international boundary. The border was now in a state of turmoil.

Added to it was, of course, the perennial quarrel between Ram and Rahim, Hindus and Muslims. It was a quarrel for which the British were blamed as long as they had been there. The machinations of a third party were habitually decried. Ram was blaming Rahim now, declaring that he was satanic by nature. And Rahim was saying it was all Ram's fault. Each party acted as though they were quite innocent themselves. Two hands are required to clap.

My wife did not want to leave Calcutta. We had been there only four months and had not yet settled down. It was our first assignment to the city. We had spent the eighteen years of my service life in the districts. Another transfer! But I was excited. My sense of history forced on me the realisation that if I wanted to see action this was the time. I was being given a role to play. It was a role of some importance. I was not going to have to look on any more as a helpless spectator.

Fateyabad, Nandiya and Rani Mahal were districts I knew well. Was there anybody in any of them who did not know me, at least by name? Was there anybody I did not know? Who else could be a better envoy of peace? This was the spirit in which I set out to take up my new duties. I was going, not to make war, but to establish peace. The administrator of Rani Mahal had been my colleague. We had worked together. As my senior deputy magistrate he had been friendly and cooperative. The administrator of Nandiya had also been my

colleague at one time although we knew each other less well.

Nobody any longer thought of anybody as a former fellow-countryman or as somebody doing a job similar to his own. I discovered it to my sorrow. To people on this side of the river those on the other side had become aliens. The courtyard had been cut off from the house, dividing the homestead.

The same people lived in the districts as before, on opposite sides of the boundary line but, by some strange alchemy they were now strangers to each other, at loggerheads, aliens and enemies.

"Sir, be careful what you say to people from across the river. They're foreigners. This district was allotted to Pakistan at first. Muslims are in a majority here. The Pakistanis still want it. If you'd seen them then! And how happy the Muslims here were! Fifth columnists! That's what they are. All of them. Every one of them is secretly convinced this district is going to become a part of Pakistan again. Not one of them can be trusted. They're deep in secret intrigue! Do you know, Sir, trucks from the other side enter the town nightly, load up with smuggled goods and go back. Scot free!" The police officer described the situation as he saw it.

Fateyabad was India's Alsace Lorraine, passing by turns from the hands of the Indians to the Pakistanis and back again. It was a source of constant friction. Fighting broke out at every opportunity. Neither party would surrender their claim to it.

Fifth columnists and smugglers appeared in both the new states after the partition of British India. A new occupation had been created. Hindus and Muslims shared in it equally. Hindus on this side signalled surreptiously to Muslims on that and Muslims over there signalled in the same way to Hindus here. Without any hesitation. Their religious differences and patriotic duties were both forgotten in their concentration on taking advantage of the new opportunities to raid the wealth of both the new states. Their operations took place chiefly at night and were carried out with speed and efficiency.

I camped for a night on the bank of the Padma and saw their signal lights for myself. Boats shot out immediately. In these matters no distinction was made between Hindus and

Muslims or between Indians and Pakistanis. Who could catch them? In whose interest was it to catch them? A certain person of importance was heard to say:

"More saris go across than anything else. What will people wear if we don't supply them with cloth and clothes? A lot of them are Hindus. We mustn't forget that." The same justification excused the smuggling of foodstuffs like rice and other things as well.

Rice was in short supply on this side. Voices were rising shrilly, angrily. Sugar was out of market. The price of cloth was going up. Strikes would follow if I failed to meet the demand. One or two ordinances were still in operation but none of them were intended for use in a situation of this kind. We had to apply them as best we could. There was no alternative. Business men were annoyed. There were those who told me to my face that they were going to complain to Bidhan Roy.

I was caught between the deep seas of conspiracy and the devil of intrigue. Day and night I laboured at my job and made others do the same. My official colleagues were matchless workers. Many of them did not agree with my opinions about Pakistan and India or the Hindu-Muslim question. But they carried out my instructions to the letter. For some reason or other their confidence in me was boundless. About my superiors I was less confident.

The fact of the matter was that the game of chess being played in Delhi and Karachi affected what happened in Calcutta and Dacca. Repercussions were felt equally in Fateyabad and Rani Mahal. We were only instrumental although we did have a degree of personal freedom of action. I guarded it with my life, never allowing myself to become a pawn.

The Superintendent of Police accompanied me when I went to inspect the international border. With binoculars we could see across the river to the other side. On the bank stood my former residence in the town of Rani Mahal. My eyes filled with tears.

"Do you see that, Sir? There? Cannons have been placed on both sides of the gate! The balls will land over here if they're fired. The river's wide here but not wide enough to

put us out of range. We've got to get hold of some cannons too."

The cannons were relics from the Moghul Period. They had been placed on the sides of the gate as a decorative measure. I did not know that at the time, but their presence did not bother me unduly.

The next thing I heard was that a Pakistani launch was patrolling the river. The Bihari Muslim officer in charge of it was interfering with our merchant shipping. He'd arrest or detain and delay our boats, sometimes sending one up to higher authorities. The stretch of the river on which he operated was, he claimed, Pakistani territory.

The boundary between the districts on this and that side of the river was in the middle of the water. Since the Partition it had taken on international significance. That particular stretch of the river lay within Indian territory according to maps made before Partition. It was an act of aggression to detain our boats in our own territory. We wrote to the Pakistani authorities. They replied that old maps and pre-Partition regulations no longer applied. Half of the river's mainstream belonged to Pakistan and half to India no matter which direction it took. According to the position of the mainstream at the moment their launch was within its rights. It had not trespassed outside Pakistani territory.

How can a line be drawn on flowing water? It is comparatively easy to draw one on dry land. I was astounded. Perhaps buoys could be set out to give a general indication of direction but would that put a stop to depredations of this kind?

It was not possible to give our boatmen adequate protection in the prevailing belligerent atmosphere. The river belonged to the strongest. A launch is mightier than a boat. To confront a launch on an equal footing another launch is called for. Only a gunboat can match a gunboat. On the open sea a battleship is met by a battleship.

Behind Dacca stood Karachi. What good would it do to negotiate with Dacca? The only way the marauding Pakistani launch could be controlled was by a launch of our own. All we wanted was to stop it from harassing our merchant shipping. We were not interested in interfering with their own boatmen. But a river is a freeway for trade. If they did not respect its

neutrality we would not either.

There was another, more weighty, reason. There were shoals in the river that rose to the surface as the water level receded, they were extremely fertile. These sandbanks are cultivated by peasants from both sides who plant in season and harvest rich crops. Several of them, according to the navigation charts, belonged to Fateyabad. Our people would be denied access to their fields if the Pakistani claim to them was conceded. No boats would be able to approach them.

As long as a former colleague and a friend of mine had been the administrator in charge of Rani Mahal there had been some basis for hope of an amicable settlement. He gave the cultivators permission to come and go as they always had, to plant and harvest as usual. Nobody, he said, would obstruct them. He insisted on maintaining the status quo. But he was transferred and a Punjabi Muslim took his place. My friend had been a Bengali. We disliked approaching the Punjabi. I wrote to the authorities asking for a launch. What else could I do? A peasant came to me in tears one day. He had not been allowed to gather his crop. The sandbank and everything on it belonged to Pakistan he was told. The man was an Indian Muslim.

Fulna had been the place where government launches were berthed under the British Raj and Fulna had fallen to India's share at the time of the Partition. The launches had been left where they were. But when the dividing line was revised Fulna went to Pakistan. The launches had gone with it. The new owners refused to divide them.

We had been left with a single launch. It was kept in Calcutta. Arrangements were made to send it to me but it did not get more than halfway. The dry season had set in and there was not enough water in the Bhagirathi to permit it to pass through the outlet from the Padma and enter the larger stream. I had almost given up all hope when I was informed a launch had at last arrived. It had put into shore in front of my residence on the riverbank. I hurried down to have a look. It was a coastal cutter named Pomfret. The navy had lent it to us for the time being. It was not ordinarily used by civilians. A naval officer had brought it, Captain Malik by name. He took me out in the Pomfret before he left. I noticed the hull was

heavily plated with iron or steel or some similar metal. The vessel moved slowly, wallowing in the water like a tortoise. And there were so many instruments crowded into it that no space was left for one's feet. There was only one cabin. It was small and uncomfortable. I put the Serang, the Tandel and the Sukhani in charge. They brought it out into the Padma.

"What have you done, sir?" a colleague warned. "Aren't you asking a cat to look after fish? The Serang and his crewmen are all Muslims from Keyakhali in Pakistan. They're earning their salt in India it is true but their hearts are over there. Your launch is going to turn up in Rani Mahal."

"They've never gone against my orders. And they will not." I refused to be intimidated.

The Pomfret was anchored at Talgola Ghat in due course. The police took charge, informing me by wireless. I was relieved. But I forgot to issue instructions that the launch was not to be used without specific orders from me.

The Pomfret, while pursuing an enemy craft, ran aground on a submerged sandbank. It was firmly stuck in the sand. The news was alarming. I was upset.

When I reached the spot the Sub-divisional Magistrate told me that he and his men had made every effort to move the cutter. Chains had been attached to it and wound around the legs of an elephant. The elephant had dragged at it with its strength but the vessel had not budged. Its iron plating weighed it down. A less heavy cutter would not have got stuck so easily. The Pakistani launch had not had any such mishap.

"It's sabotage," my colleague said. "An underwater sandbank! Huh! We shouldn't have forgotten the crew are Muslims from Keyakhali. What did you expect? Get some Hindu crewmen. They're available in South India."

I couldn't see how the laskars were to blame. They hadn't taken out the launch. The person who had was a Hindu. An official.

The incident was reported by telephone. I asked for assistance. Experts came. They got lost on their way to the Pomfret. Their boat strayed into Pakistani waters and they were promptly arrested and taken to Rani Mahal. I left for Calcutta and presented myself at the Government Secretariat as soon as the news reached me. I was nervous.

"What's there to be so nervous about?" asked the Chief Secretary, smiling. "Hitler kept his nerve, didn't he, even when whole divisions were disappearing. All we've lost is a couple of experts."

The experts were sent back to us after a lot of negotiation. The Pomfret stayed where it was, resting on the sandbank like Bhishma on his bed of arrows. Guards were posted to keep watch over it. There was a risk of the launch floating off on its own and drifting down the river into the Bay of Bengal. No amount of protest or negotiation could recover it in that case. It would disappear into the sea like a creature of the deep.

Nightmares tormented me. The Pomfret had been caught and sent to the Pakistani kitchen. From there it made its way into the Pakistani stomach. No, no. It was being used against us. Our teeth were being broken on our own grindstone. No. The Pomfret had disappeared into the Bay of Bengal. It would not come back. The Pomfret would never come back.

Prestige was involved. How could I talk with the Rani Mahal authorities on an equal footing after this? Impossible! I wouldn't be able to raise my head in front of them. The Pomfret had become a symbol. It signified my self-esteem. I had to get it back. The question was how.

By that time the problem of the sand shoals had taken precedence over every other. The people on the other side were determined to take by force what was not theirs by right. We could not give our cultivators or cattle herders the degree of protection they required. The lush grass that grew on the sand banks made them desirable grazing grounds. Had the rights the herders and cultivators enjoyed for centuries vanished into thin air with the partition of the country? How could I reconcile myself to any such thing? Had our men become aliens overnight?

I had never wanted the Partition. Yet it was clear that if the internecine quarrelling of the Hindus and Muslims took a religious turn the life of no Hindu would be safe. Every Hindu would naturally migrate to a predominantly Hindu area. He would not be secure anywhere else. In Hindu majority areas no Muslims would be safe either. Muslims would migrate to Muslim majority areas. A de facto division would be the auto-

matic result. Neither the Congress nor the Muslim League by itself could rule the whole of India. The country would split of its own accord as the British withdrew. Religious conflict had to be prevented at all costs. Could anybody do that? Both parties always clamoured for retaliation. No. One of them would have to rise above feelings of vengeance. The Partition would have to be tolerated until that happened.

Nobody would benefit from an exchange of population. Migration would have disastrous consequences. The Partition had to be accepted. People must stay in their places and feel secure in them. In Fateyabad Muslims were the majority. Hindus were the majority in Fulna. Both should feel secure. The Government of India should concern itself only with the rights of its citizens irrespective of their religious allegiances.

I had come to this place as the envoy of peace. My task was to restore peace, to make everybody feel secure, each in his or her own place. What I had become was just the opposite. Here I was knocking at the doors of the Government authorities about a few square miles of sand, land that was submerged a large part of the year. The answer I got was that only the army could deal with the problem. An international border was involved. Army men began to appear in Fateyabad. They came to inspect the sandbanks. They belonged to all ranks; there were majors and brigadiers, lieutenant-colonels and lieutenant-generals. For me the experience was bizarre. I had never before come into such close contact with the armed forces.

More of that some other day. Let it suffice for me to say here that those who have seen war are its staunchest opponents. Anybody who thinks the army is crazy to fight because it is made up of professional soldiers is absolutely wrong. Only those who have never been near a battlefield go wild enough to demand slaughter.

The Brigadier was our house guest. "I've fought on battlefields round the world," he said to my wife, "during two World Wars. And I think I'm as non-violent as anybody, probably more so. I know what war is. Listen to me. Tell your husband non-violence is always best."

"To take a couple of sandbanks is child's play for the

Indian army," the Lieutenant General said to me, "but if a single jawan loses his life the prestige of the whole country suffers. It becomes an international incident. International war follows. Do you want to risk that? Take my advice. Don't expect the army to help you. Ask the armed police to handle it."

Five small villages, the possession of which was disputed, gave rise to the great battle of Kurukshetra, according to the Mahabharata story. Was another war of potential magnitude to start over three sandy shoals in the middle of a river? Was I to be the well-meaning inaugurator? Never. I requested the West Bengal Government to send me a squad of armed police. They dully arrived bringing a variety of weapons with them. It was plain that they constituted a semi-military force.

"Sir, what have these policemen come to do here?" my Superintendent of Police exclaimed when he saw them. "Be careful. Our men will go on strike if a single member of the force is hurt."

I had never heard him speak with so much feeling. Was the life of a policeman more important than the honour of our country? I did not want any casualties to occur at all, on either side, but if there was any would policemen all over India go on strike?

"Don't misunderstand me, sir." he protested. "What are the duties of the police? To catch robbers and thieves. We've done that. To regulate traffic? We've done that. To curb communists? We've done that too. But you're asking us to exchange fire with the armed forces of a foreign state. Is this a police job? Did the authorities tell us it would be part of our duty at the time of recruitment?"

Six or seven more launches had arrived in the meantime. They were vessels of the type called tanac, streamlined and light, not heavy like the Pomfret, and they did not draw much water. I kept them in a comparatively safe place west of the point at which the Ganges becomes the Padma. Yes, the men who manned them were Muslim laskars, men from the tidal bayous of Keyakhali.

"Your navy's going to disappear some day," a colleague warned me. He was joking. "And it may reappear as a fleet of Pakistani gunboats."

The risk had to be taken. I had no choice. Each launch had a crew that had been with it a long time. These crews knew how to handle them. It was because we needed skilled men like these that India had adopted a secular policy. They enjoyed equal rights with all other citizens and it was as much in their interest as ours to protect India. Every single man of them was a national asset. I knew it.

So were the men who farmed the sandbanks They too were Muslims. Their crops were the ones placed in jeopardy. All I was doing was in their interest. Did it matter otherwise? But I could not allow the launches to be captured or stolen. Each had a wireless. Reports came in at regular intervals. All was well.

I had written off the Pomfret but I worried about it continually. The arrogance of the Pakistanis would be offensive if they succeeded in getting their hands on it. It would be exhibited as a war trophy. And if the Pomfret engines failed and it drifted out to sea it would never be recovered.

A sudden unseasonable flood in the United Provinces solved my problem. The river level rose, swollen with the rush of water flowing into it from upcountry. A day came when a wireless message informed me the Pomfret had been rescued. I hurried down to see it. There it was, safely anchored at Talgola Ghat. I was told the Serang, the Tandel and the Sukhani had gone on board when the river began to rise. They had started the engines as soon as the Pomfret was afloat.

No man should ever be mistrusted merely because of the religious faith he professes. Those you protect will, in their turn, protect you.

—Bengali short story
Translated by Lila Ray

VISHNU PRABHAKAR

The Incomplete Story

The sound of slogans gradually became low and then became very faint. The crowd on the platform began to disperse and everyone took his seat in the train. In the meantime a Muslim gentleman was involved in discussion with a Hindu gentleman. The young man was telling, "We do not want Pakistan, but Congress has compelled us and now we will surely have it."

The Hindu replied bitterly, "Pakistan... Pakistan... you could not make it in the six hundred years of your rule, you now want to create it during slavery. It is absolutely impossible."

A heavy-bodied Muslim, who was sitting on the opposite berth, intercepted, "No sir, we have ruled for nine hundred years."

"Yes, nine hundred years."

"And throughout those nine hundred years the Hindus had been despising us."

"What did you say?" spoke the Hindu. "Had Hindus been hating you?" He further said, "But remember, tyrants are to be hated, they cannot be loved."

The Muslim replied politely, "Everyone has a different opinion about cruelty, but, my friend, you people have snubbed us You abstained even from our shadow. Admitted, we were cruel, but tyrants have hearts as well, which can be softened sometime; but abstinence always undermines love. It provokes hatred. You hated us and expected love in return. How it could have been possible? Excuse me, I have great esteem for you. I fully support friendly relationship, but please don't mind, I would like to ask you one thing."

The bitter attitude of the Hindu was, by now, changing into slight nervousness and the Muslim was smiling gracefully. He said, "By all means, please ask."

The Muslim spoke courteously, "The untouchables are Hindus, but once you give them power, then see whether they love you or hate you."

The Hindu was stupefied. He could not find an appropriate reply. The Muslim continued with the same seriousness, "I admit, today, you treat them on equal terms. I have friends who regard schism as the greatest sin. But my friend, we will have to suffer the consequences of the sins of those who had been helping, knowingly, in widening this gulf of discrimination. Please do'nt take it as if I am attacking your community or religion. I understand your religion. I have respect for it. I am also aware of the shortcomings of the Muslims. But if someone tries to cover his own weaknesses by pointing out the shortcomings of others, it will simply reveal his own obstinacy and foolishness. Courage, to face truth and reality, shows the manly qualities in a man. I will tell you a story. My mother told it to me."

Having spoken so much he stopped for a while. There was complete silence in the compartment. Nobody could know when the train had steamed off and making rattling noise had reached the next station. The sun was setting. Someone pressed the switch, and the whole compartment was flooded with electric light.

The heavy-bodied Muslim began his story: My friends, this incident took place some thirty years ago. There is a small town in our province. It has a mixed population of Hindus, Muslims and others. They loved each other. They shared in happiness and in distress. They also quarrelled sometimes, but these quarrels helped in deepening the sentiments of love. The Muslims used to congratulate the Hindus on their festivals. Transactions of the seasonal crops were carried out. On Holi festival, it was the duty of the Muslims to provide barley. On Id, Hindus used to distribute milk of their cows and buffalows among the Muslims. Since early morning they used to stand at their doors after milking and gave milk to the Muslims. That day their ovens used to remain cold but their hearts had all the warmth of happiness and affection. I don't know how or since when this tradition began. Tyranny can also be in its root, but during those days it was an expression of love, humanity and sympathy. I will now tell you the story of one particular Id. Gay atmosphere prevailed in Muslim houses. Their children, like small angels, were puffing up with joy. But the world is world after all. Here life is accompanied with the

shadow of death. Happiness is coupled always with sorrow. While everybody was happy, one child was sitting silent and sad beside his mother's bed in his house. His mother Fatima was sick. She had breathing trouble, and was restlessly tossing her hands and feet. But restlessness was not so much due to fever, but because of the memory of her husband. Ahmad's father was alive last year, and the house was like heaven. One day he suddenly expired. The house was deserted. Today was Id but... God knows what Fatima thought. She got up. She told panting, "Oh my son, so much time has passed, did you not go to fetch milk?"

Ahmad shook his head in negation and said, "No, Mother."

Fatima got a shock, tears filled her eyes She began to curse herself, "How mean I am? Today is the festival of the year and my son is sitting helpless. No, no, today we will celebrate Id." She told Ahmad, "Go quickly and bring the milk. By then I will take out your clothes. Now hurry up, my child."

Ahmad looked up towards his mother and then he picked up a can and went out. But it was too late. All the people had finished distributing the milk and were busy with their work. On the way he saw his friends returning happily with their cans and jars filled with milk. They saw him and said with surprise, "Oh, you are too late. Where had you been till now? Now it is useless to go!"

Ahmad heard it and his heart began to sink. They were right. On every door he found only the drops of milk that had fallen on the ground. He could not get anything. He was very much disheartened. His eyes became wet. Still a ray of hope kept him moving ahead. Suddenly somebody called him from one door, "Ahmad, Ahmad!"

Ahmad saw towards him. The one who had called was his classmate Dileep. Ahmad hesitated. Dileep came running and said, "Where had you been till now? Your can is empty."

Ahmad told him in a hoarse voice, "My mother is sick, so I got late."

"Then?"

"I do not have a drop of milk."

"No milk?"

"For some time they stood silently on the door, which, only

half an hour earlier, was ringing with the voices of those who had come there to take the milk. Suddenly Dileep thought something and he ran inside his house. While going he said, "You stay here, I am just coming."

He went straight to his mother and whispered, "Bhabhi, is there some more milk?"

Mother replied, "Yes, there is milk for you and Munna. Will you drink?"

"No."

Mother was surprised and asked, "Then?"

Dileep remained silent.

"What is the matter, tell me."

"Ahmad could not get milk."

"Who is Ahmad?"

"He reads with me. His mother is sick, that is why he got late." Saying so he looked towards his mother in such a way as if he had committed a blunder. But the heart of the mother was filled with joy. She smiled. She picked up the pitcher full of the milk and said, "Come along, show me where is your friend?"

Dileep jumped up with joy. Mother and son came out to the door. Ahmad was standing there as before. Dileep said to him laughing, "Ahmad, bring your can, hurry up."

Dileep's milk filled the can of Ahmad and a feeling of deep love for Dileep filled his heart.

The mother asked, "Is your mother sick?"

"Yes."

"Who will prepare the *seviyans*?"

"She will prepare."

"Will you give us some?"

Ahmad shook his head and said, "Certainly."

The mother laughed and said, "May God cure your mother quickly! Now go home, if you would have come earlier, you would have got more milk." After that the mother took Dileep's hand in her hand and went inside. She was praying in her heart, "Oh God, please help my child to remain generous."

Ahmad reached home. He was puffing up with joy. No sooner had he entered the door of his house, he shouted, "Mother, I have brought the milk."

Fatima became very happy and said, "You have brought

the milk, very good. Where did you get it?"

Ahmad told her, "Mother, it was too late and all the milk had finished, but Dileep requested his mother and she gave me so much milk." Then all of a sudden he asked her, "Mother, is the milk sufficient?"

"It is quite a lot, my son, it is more than enough." said the mother.

"Yes, mother, this milk was kept for him to drink."

"Oh, for his own use."

"Yes, for him and for his younger brother. They kept for them very little and all the rest they gave me."

Fatima's heart was overwhelmed with joy. She prayed, "God bless him, he has helped a poor one." After that Fatima made preparations for celebrating Id. Her fever had gone down. She bathed Ahmad and changed his clothes. She had somehow managed a new *kurta* and *payjama* for him, but the shoe was old. She made it shine by polishing it with oil. She stitched a new lace on the cap. Ahmad happily went out to meet his friends. He was to go for prayers and later on to see the fair. All his companions had money in their pockets. Their eyes were glittering with joy. All the boys were thinking about the sweets and the toy shops. Though Ahmad had very little money with him, his heart was full of joy. There was no cause for him to be dejected; his mother had told him that his father had gone abroad to bring a lot of money and would return home the next Id, as the father of Niaz had done. This gave him great confidence. Ahmad reached Id-gah for prayers. He saw there thousands of men praying together. After the prayers, he strolled about enjoying the fair. He surveyed the shops of *chat*, sweets, fruits and toys etc. He saw his companions enjoying the swings, but he had postponed all his programmes for the next year and so he returned home after spending the money his mother had given him. At home the *seviyans* were ready. The *seviyans* were garnished with coconut pieces. Milk had acquired a yellowish tinge. His heart was happy with joy. Fatima looked at him lovingly and said, "My son, bring the bowls and take some *seviyans* to your aunt. After that you go to your maternal uncle's place and then. . .'

Ahmad intercepted, "Are these to be distributed in every house?"

"Yes son, they will also send us," said his mother.

"O.K., Mother, I will distribute them immediately."

Fatima filled both the bowls with *seviyans* and covered them with kerchiefs, so that kites may not pounce upon them. Ahmad picked up one bowl and got up to go. As soon as he crossed the door, he remembered something. He thought, "*Seviyans* should first be sent to Dileep's house. He had given the milk to me, which was his own share."

He changed the route. Instead of going to his aunt's place, he moved towards Dileep's house. He thought his mother would be glad to hear this. Mother was sick and perhaps due to sickness she had forgotten to mention Dileep, otherwise. . . He reached Dileep's house. The door was closed. He hesitated for a while and remained standing. Then, mustering courage, he called out, "Dileep."

Nobody answered.

He called again. This time someone asked, "Who is there?" And with these words, he came out. He was the elder brother of Dileep. He glanced at Ahmad with surprise and asked, "What do you want?"

Ahmad hesitated for a moment and then spoke, "Is Dileep in?"

"No."

"His mother?"

"What for do you want Mother?"

Ahmad said, "My name is Ahmad. I read with Dileep. In the morning, he had given me the milk of his own share."

Dileep's brother smiled. In the meantime his mother and aunt also arrived. Dileep's brother said, "Now what do you want?"

"Sir, I have brought *seviyans* for you. Your mother had told me to. . .'

Before Ahmad could complete his sentence, Dileep's brother began laughing and said, "Oh, how innocent! Now go to your house."

The aunt of Dileep spoke, "How can we eat your *seviyans*? Should we destroy our religion?"

The mother of Dileep politely said, "Son, I told you so by way of fun. We cannot eat *seviyans* from your house."

Ahmad was taken aback. His little heart was shocked,

but inspite of that, he gathered courage and said, "Why can't you eat these? We also have taken the milk from you."

The brother of Dileep in an effort to make him understand, said, "Child, you are a very good boy. God bless you, but we Hindus regard it a sin to eat anything touched by Muslims."

Ahmad knew nothing about sin or virtue. He was unaware of so deep a gulf of discrimination between Hindus and Muslims. He was thinking only of the love of Dileep and his mother. Hearing this, he felt dizzy. He felt embarrassed, and as soon as he turned to go back, his hand trembled. The bowl of *seviyans* fell with a loud thud on the same table on which the very same morning Dileep and his mother had poured their love in Ahmad's heart in the shape of milk. There the *seviyans* were now scattered all around and Ahmad's love also lay there crushed.

The story had to be stopped at this point. The train had reached the platform and I had to get down there. Breaking the seriousness of the compartment I picked up my bag and came down on the platform. I then glanced at the Muslim gentleman. I said, "Well, I don't know where your story would end, but this much I have understood that you yourself are Ahmad."

Mr. Ahmad smiled and said, "You have guessed correctly. I am the same child."

I asked, "Please tell me frankly, has that mark of affection been totally wiped out?"

He was smiling as before. He spoke, "My friend, nothing perishes in this world, at least not love. Only sometimes, due to our carelessness, it is shadowed by a flimsy screen."

"That's right," I said, "please be sure, we shall leave no stone unturned in shattering that screen."

Saying this I departed. Perhaps the story might have continued, but for me this incomplete story has become so prickly. In the loneliness of the night, sometimes, my heart aches so terribly that I cannot tell . . .

—Hindi short story
Translated by K.S. Mathur

RAJINDER SINGH BEDI

Lajwanti

> "The leaves of Lajwanti* wither with the touch of human hands."—*Punjabi Folk Song*

After the great holocaust when people had washed the blood from their bodies they turned their attention to those whose hearts had been torn by the partition.

In every street and by-lane they set up a rehabilitation committee. In the beginning people worked with great enthusiasm to rehabilitate refugees in work camps, on the land and in homes. But there still remained the task of rehabilitating abducted women, those that were recovered and brought back home: and over this they ran into difficulties. The slogan of the supporters was "Rehabilitate them in your hearts." It was strongly opposed by people living in the vicinity of the temple of Narain Bawa.

The campaign was started by the residents of Mulla Shakoor. They set up a 'rehabilitation of hearts' committee. A local lawyer was elected president. But the more important post of secretary went to Babu Sunder Lal who got a majority of eleven votes over his rival. It was the opinion of the old petition writer and many other respectable citizens of the locality that no one would work more zealously than Sunder Lal, because amongst the women abducted during the riots, and not recovered, was Sunder Lal's wife, Lajwanti.

The Rehabilitation of Hearts Committee daily took out a procession through the streets in the early hours of the morning. They sang as they went along. Whenever his friends Rasalu and Neki Ram started singing "the leaves of Lajwanti wither with the touch of human hands," Sunder Lal would fall silent. He would walk as if in a daze. Where in the name of God was Lajwanti? Was she thinking of him? Would she ever come back? . . . and his steps would falter on the even surface of the brickpaved road.

* Lajwanti—the touch-me-not whose leaves fold up if touched.

Sunder Lal had abandoned all hope of finding Lajwanti. He had made his loss a part of the general loss. He had drowned his personal sorrow by plunging into social service. Even so, whenever he raised his voice to join the chorus, he could not avoid thinking—'how fragile is the human heart' ... exactly like the Lajwanti ... one only has to bring a finger close to it and its leaves curl up.

He had behaved very badly towards his Lajwanti; he had allowed himself to be irritated with everything she did—even with the way she stood up or sat down, the way she cooked and the way she served his food; he had thrashed her at every pretext.

His poor Lajo who was as slender as the cypress! Life in the open air and sunshine had tanned her skin and filled her with an animal vitality. She ran about the lanes in her village with the mercurial grace of dew drops on a leaf. Her slim figure was full of robust health. When he first saw her, Sunder Lal was a little dismayed. But when he saw that Lajwanti took in her stride every adversity including the chastisement he gave her, he increased the dose of thrashing. He was unaware of the limit of human endurance. And Lajwanti's reactions were of little help, even after the most violent beating all Sunder Lal had to do was to smile and the girl would break into giggles: "If you beat me again, I'll never speak to you."

Lajo forgot everything about the thrashing as soon as it was over; all men beat their wives. If they did not and let them have their way, women were the first to start talking, "What kind of man is he! He can't manage a chit of a girl like her!"

They made songs of the beatings men gave their wives. Lajo herself sang a couplet which ran somewhat as follows:

> I will not marry a city lad
> City lads wear boots
> And I have such a small bottom.

Nevertheless the first time Lajo met a boy from the city she fell in love with him: this was Sunder Lal. He had come with the bridegroom's party at Lajwanti's sister's wedding. His eyes had fallen on Lajwanti and he had whispered in the bridegroom's ear, "Your sister-in-law is quite a saucy morsel; your bride's likely to be a dainty dish, old chap!" Lajo had overheard Sunder Lal. The words went to her head. She did not

notice the enormous boots Sunder Lal was wearing; she also forgot that her behind was small.

Such were the thoughts that coursed round Sunder Lal's head when he went out singing in the morning procession. He would say to himself, 'If I got another chance, just one more chance, I would really rehabilitate her in my heart. I could set an example to the people and tell them: these poor women are not to blame, they were victimised by lecherous ravishers. A society which refuses to accept these helpless women is rotten beyond redemption and deserves to be liquidated.' He agitated for the rehabilitation of abducted women and for according them the respect due to a wife, mother, daughter and sister in any home. He exhorted the men never to remind these women of their past experiences because they had become as sensitive as the Lajwanti and would, like the leaves of the plant, wither when a finger was pointed towards them.

In order to propagate the cause of Rehabilitation of Hearts, the Mulla Shakoor Committee organised morning processions. The early hours of the dawn were blissfully peaceful—no hubub of people, no noise of traffic. Even street dogs, who had kept an all-night vigil, were fast asleep beside the *tandoors*. People who were roused from their slumbers by the singing would simply mutter "Oh, the dawn chorus" and go back to their dreams.

People listened to Babu Sunder Lal's exhortations sometimes with patience, sometimes with irritation. Women who had no trouble in coming across from Pakistan were utterly complacent, like over-ripe cauliflowers. Their menfolk were indifferent and grumbled; their children treated the songs on rehabilitation like lullabys to make them sleep again.

Words which assail one's ears in the early hours of the dawn have a habit of going round in the head with insidious intent. Often a person who has not understood their meaning will find himself humming them while he is about his business.

When Miss Mridula Sarabhai arranged for the exchange of abducted women between India and Pakistan, some men of Mulla Shakoor expressed their readiness to take them back. Their relatives went to receive them in the market place. For some time the abducted women and their menfolk faced each other in awkward silence. Then they swallowed their pride,

took their women and re-built their domestic lives. Rasalu, Neki Ram and Sunder Lal joined the throng and encouraged the rehabilitators with slogans like "Long Live Mahinder Singh .... Long Live Sohan Lal." They yelled till their throats were parched.

There were some people who refused to have anything to do with the abducted women who came back. "Why couldn't they have killed themselves? Why didn't they take poison and preserve their virtue and their honour? Why didn't they jump into a well? They are cowards, they clung to life . ."

Hundreds of thousands of women had in fact killed themselves rather than be dishonoured . . . how could the dead know what courage it needed to face the cold, hostile world of the living—a hard-hearted world in which husbands refused to acknowledge their wives. And some of these women would think sadly of their names and the joyful meanings they had. . . "Suhagwanti. . . of marital bliss"—or they would turn to a younger brother and say, "Oi Bihari, my own little darling brother, when you were a baby I looked after you as if you were my own son." And Bihari would want to slip away into a corner, but his feet would remain rooted to the ground and he would stare helpless at his parents. The parents steeled their hearts and looked fearfully at Narain Bawa; and Narain Bawa looked equally helplessly at heaven—the heaven that has no substance but is merely an optical illusion, a boundary line beyond which we cannot see!

Miss Sarabhai brought a truck-load of Hindu women from Pakistan, to be exchanged with Muslim women abducted by Indians. Lajwanti was not amongst them. Sunder Lal watched with hope and expectancy till the last of the Hindu women had come down from the truck. And then with patient resignation plunged himself in the committee's activities. The committee redoubled its work and began taking out processions and singing both morning and evening, as well as organising meetings. The aged lawyer, Kalka Prasad, addressed the meetings in his wheezy, asthmatic voice (Rasalu kept a spitoon in readiness beside him). Strange noises came over the microphone when Kalka Prasad was speaking.

Neki Ram also said his few words. But whatever he said or quoted from the scriptures seemed to go against his point of

view. Whenever the tide of battle seemed to be going against them, Babu Sunder Lal would rise and stem the retreat. He was never able to complete more than a couple of sentences. His throat went dry and tears streamed down his eyes. His heart was always too full for words and he had to sit down without making his speech. An embarrassed silence would descend on the audience. But the two sentences that Sunder Lal spoke came from the bottom of his anguished heart and had a greater impact than all the clever verbosity of the lawyer, Kalka Prasad. The men shed a few tears and lightened the burden on their hearts; and then they went home without a thought in their empty heads.

One day the Rehabilitation of Hearts Committee was out early in the afternoon. It trespassed into an area near the temple which was looked upon as the citadel of orthodox reaction. The faithful were seated on a cement platform under the peepul tree and were listening to a commentary on the Ramayana. By sheer coincidence Narain Bawa happened to be narrating the incident about Rama overhearing a washerman say to his errant wife: "I am not Sri Ram Chandra to take back a woman who has spent many years with another man—and being overcome by the implied rebuke, Ram Chandra had ordered his own wife Sita, who was at the time far gone with child, to leave his palace."

"Can one find a better example of the high standard of morality?" asked Narain Bawa of his audience. "Such was the sense of equality in the Kingdom of Rama that even the remark of a poor washerman was given full consideration. This was true Ram Rajya—the Kingdom of God on earth."

The procession had halted near the temple and had stopped to listen to the discourse. Sunder Lal heard the last sentence and spoke up: "We do not want a Ram Rajya of this short."

"Be quiet!... Who is this man? ... Silence," came the cries from the audience.

Sunder Lal clove his way through the crowd and said loudly, "No one can stop me from speaking..."

Another volley of protests came from the crowd. "Silence!" ... "We will not let you say a word." And someone shouted from a corner, "We'll kill you!"

Narain Bawa spoke gently, "My dear Sunder Lal, you do

not understand the sacred traditions of the Vedas."

Sunder Lal was ready with his retort: "I understand at least one thing: in Ram Rajya the voice of a washerman was heard, but the present-day protagonists of the same Ram Rajya cannot bear to hear the voice of Sunder Lal."

The people who had threatened to beat up Sunder Lal were put to shame.

"Let him speak," yelled Rasalu and Neki Ram. "Silence! Let us hear him."

And Sunder Lal began to speak: "Sri Rama was our hero. But what kind of justice was this, that he accepted the word of a washerman and refused to take the word of so great a Maharani as his wife!"

Narain Bawa answered, "Sita was his own wife; Sunder Lal, you have not realised that very important fact."

"Bawaji, there are many things in this world which are beyond my comprehension. I believe that the only true Ram Rajya is a state where a person neither does wrong to anyone nor suffers anyone to do him any wrong."

Sunder Lal's words arrested everyone's attention. He continued his oration. "Injustice to oneself is as great a wrong as inflicting it on others . . . even today Lord Rama has ejected Sita from his home . . . only because she was compelled to live with her abductor, Ravana . . . what sin had Sita committed? Wasn't she the victim of a ruse and then of violence like our own mothers and sisters today? Was it a question of Sita's rightness and wrongness, or the wickedness of Ravana? Ravana had ten heads, the donkey has only one large one . . . today our innocent Sitas have been thrown out of their homes . . . Sita . . . Lajwanti." . . . Sunder Lal broke down and wept.

Rasalu and Neki Ram raised aloft their banners: school children had cut out and pasted slogans on them. They yelled "Long Live Babu Sunder Lal." Somebody in the crowd shouted, "Long Live Sita—the queen of virtue." And somebody else cried "Sri Ram Chandra. . ."

Many voices shouted "Silence." Many people left the congregation and joined the procession. Narain Bawa's months of preaching were undone in a few moments. The lawyer, Kalka Prasad, and the petition writer, Hukam Singh, led the procession towards the great square . . . tapping a sort of

victory tatoo with their decrepit walking sticks. Sunder Lal had not yet dried his tears. The processionists sang with great gusto.

"The leaves of Lajwanti wither with the touch . . ."

The dawn had not yet greyed the eastern horizon when the song of the processionists assailed the ears of the residents of Mullah Shakoor. The widow in house 414 stretched her limbs and being still heavy with sleep went back to her dreams. Lal Chand who was from Sunder Lal's village came running. He stuck his arms out of his shawl and said breathlessly: "Congratulations, Sunder Lal." Sunder Lal prodded the embers in his chillum and asked. "What for, Lal Chand?"

"I saw sister-in-law Lajo."

The chillum fell from Sunder Lal's hands; the sweetened tobacco scattered on the floor. "Where did you see her?" he asked, taking Lal Chand by the shoulder.

"On the border at Wagah."

Sunder Lal let go of Lal Chand. "It must have been someone else." he said quickly and sat down on his haunches.

"No, brother Sunder Lal, it was sister-in-law Lajo," repeated Lal Chand with reassurance. "The same Lajo."

"Could you recognise her?" asked Sunder Lal gathering bits of the tobacco and mashing them in his palm. He took Rasalu's chillum and continued; "All right, tell me what are her distinguishing marks?"

"You are a strange one to think that I wouldn't recognise her! She has a tatoo mark on her chin, another on her right cheek and . . ."

"Yes, yes, yes," exploded Sunder Lal and completed his wife's description: "the third one is on her forehead."

He sat up on his knees. He wanted to remove all doubt. He recalled the marks Lajwanti had tatooed on her body as a child; they were like the green spots on the leaves of the Lajwanti, which disappear when the leaves curl up. His Lajwanti behaved exactly in the same way; whenever he pointed out her tatoo marks she used to curl up in embarrassment as if in a shell—almost as if she were stripped and her nakedness was being exposed. A strange longing as well as fear wracked S under Lal's body. He took Lal Chand by the arm

and asked, "How did Lajo get to the border?"

"There was an exchange of abducted women between India and Pakistan."

"What happened?" Sunder Lal stood up suddenly and repeated impatiently. "Tell me, what happened then?"

Rasalu rose from the charpoy and in his smoker's wheezy voice asked, "Is it really true that sister-in-law Lajo is back?"

Lal Chand continued his story . . . "At the border the Pakistanis returned sixteen of our women and took back sixteen of theirs . . . there was some argument . . . our chaps said that the women they were handing over were old or middle-aged . . . and of little use. A large crowd gathered and hot words were exchanged. Then one of their fellows got Lajo to stand up on top of the truck, snatched away her *duppatta* and spoke: "Would you describe her as an old woman?". . Take a good look at her . . . is there one amongst those you have given us who could measure up to her?" and Lajo Bhabi was overcome with embarrassment and began hiding her tatoo marks. The argument got very heated and both parties threatened to take back their "goods." I cried out, "Lajo! . . . sister-in-law Lajo!" . . . There was a tumult . . . our police cracked down upon us."

Lal Chand bared his elbow to show the mark of a lathi blow. Rasalu and Neki Ram remained silent. Sunder Lal stared vacantly into space.

Sunder Lal was getting ready to go to the border at Wagah when he heard of Lajo's return. He became nervous and could not make up his mind whether to go to meet her or wait for her at home. He wanted to run away, to spread out all the banners and placards he had carried, sit in their midst and cry to his heart's content. But, like other men, all he did was to proceed to the police station as if nothing untoward had happened. And suddenly he found Lajo standing in front of him. She looked scared and shook like a *peepul* leaf in the wind.

Sunder Lal looked up. His Lajwanti carried a *dupatta* worn by Muslim women; and she had wrapped it round her head in the Muslim style. Sunder Lal was also upset by the fact that Lajo looked healthier than before; her complexion was clearer and she had put on weight. He had sworn to say nothing to his wife but he could not understand why, if she was

happy, had she come away? Had the government compelled her to come against her will?

There were many men at the police station. Some were refusing to take back their women. "We will not take these sluts, left-over by the Muslims," they said. Sunder Lal overcame his revlusion. He had thrown himself body and soul into this movement. And there were his colleagues Neki Ram, the old clerk, and the lawyer, Kalka Prasad, with their raucous voices yelling slogans over the microphone. Through this Babel of speeches and slogans, Sunder Lal and Lajo proceeded to their home. The scene of a thousand years ago was being repeated; Sri Ram Chandra and Sita returning to Ayodhya after their long exile. Some people were lighting lamps of joy to welcome them and at the same time repenting of their sins which had forced an innocent couple to suffer such hardship.

Sunder Lal continued to work with the Rehabilitation of Hearts Committee with the same zeal. He fulfilled his pledge in the spirit in which it was taken and even those who had suspected him to be an arm-chair theorist were converted to his point of view. But there were many who were angry with the turn of events. The widow in number 414 wasn't the only one to keep away from Lajwanti's house.

Sunder Lal had nothing but contempt for these people. The queen of his heart was back home; his once silent temple now resounded with laughter; he had installed a living idol in his innermost sanctum and sat outside the gate like a sentry. Sunder Lal did not call Lajo by her name; he addressed her as a goddess—Devi. Lajo responded to the affection and began to open up, as her namesake unfurls its leaves. She was deliriously happy. She wanted to tell Sunder Lal of her experiences and by her tears wash away her sins. But Sunder Lal would not let her broach the subject. At night she would stare at his face. When she was caught doing so she could offer no explanation. And the tired Sunder Lal would fall asleep again.

Only on the first day of her return had Sunder Lal asked Lajwanti about her "black days"—Who was he . . .? Lajwanti had lowered her eyes and replied "Jumma." Then she looked Sunder Lal full in the face as if she wanted to say something. But Sunder Lal had such a queer look in his eyes and started

playing with her hair. Lajo dropped her eyes once more. Sunder Lal asked, "Was he good to you?"

"Yes."

"Didn't beat you, did he?"

Lajwanti leant back and rested her head on Sunder Lal's chest. "No . . . he never said a thing to me. He did not beat me, but I was terrified of him. You beat me but I was never afraid of you . . . you won't beat me again, will you?"

Sunder Lal's eyes brimmed with tears. In a voice full of remorse and shame he said "No, Devi . . . never . . . I shall never beat you again."

"Goddess!" Lajo pondered over the word for a while and then began to sob. She wanted to tell him everything but Sunder Lal stopped her. "Let's forget the past; you did not commit any sin. What is evil is the social system which refuses to give an honoured place to virtuous women like you. That doesn't harm you, it only harms the society."

Lajwanti's secret remained locked in her breast. She looked at her own body which had, since the partition, become the body of a goddess. It no longer belonged to her. She was blissfully happy; but her happiness was tinged with disbelief and a superstitious fear that it would not last.

Many days passed in this way. Suspicion took the place of joy: not because Sunder Lal had resumed ill-treating her, but because he was treating her too well. Lajo never expected him to be so considerate. She wanted him to be the same old Sunder Lal with whom she quarrelled over a carrot and who appeased her with a radish. Now there was no chance of a quarrel. Sunder Lal made her feel like something fragile, like glass which would splinter at the slightest touch. Lajo took to gazing at herself in the mirror. And in the end she could no longer recognise the Lajo she had known. She had been rehabilitated but not accepted. Sunder Lal did not want eyes to see her tears nor ears to hear her wailing.

. . . And still every morning Sunder Lal went out with the morning procession. Lajo, dragging her tired body to the window would hear the song whose words no one understood— "The leaves of Lajwanti wither with the touch of human hands."

—Urdu short story
Translated by Khushwant Singh

UPENDRANATH ASHK

The Chopping Machine

When the Muslims of Islamabad decided to save their lives and forgot about their worldly possessions they simply ran away. This was when our neighbour Lehna Singh's wife became alert and aware.

"Are you going to sit at home like an impotent man?" said the Sardarni. "The others are going to take possession of all the good houses."

Sardar Lehna Singh could tolerate anything but not a woman calling him an impotent man. He retied the loose turban on his bun, secured the loose end of his *lungi*, inspected his *kirpan's* sharpness and put it back in the case, and then left his house to take possession of a good new house in Islamabad.

He was still in the courtyard when the Sardarni came running with a big lock, "If you find a house how will you take possession of it?" she said. "Here, take this lock along with you."

Sardar Lehna Singh held the lock in one hand, put his other hand on the *kirpan* and proceeded towards Islamabad.

Our bungalow was on the Khalsa College road near the puppet theatre in Amritsar. In the open courtyard next door Sardar Lehna Singh used to sell the fodder cutting machines. In a corner stood two dark and damp very small rooms.

Due to the shortage of accomodation Sardarji used to live in these rooms. Even though he had started the business of selling these choppers with an investment of only two thousand rupees, due to the war and the prosperity of the farmers his business had expanded greatly. With the arrival of money came the desire for comforts and worldly goods. In the beginning the couple was very happy to have the courtyard and the small dingy rooms. But now his wife, known as Sardarni in the locality, had become acutely indifferent to the darkness and dampness of these rooms. To demonstrate their efficiency of machines fodder was chopped all day long in the courtyard.

The courtyard was lined with machines which without any emotion kept chopping with their sharp knives. The noise hurt the Sardarni's ears as if someone was hammering her ears continuously. Different kinds of grass littered all over the yard were no more welcome to her eyes. Inspite of the silken *pugree* and *lungi* and a long Boski shirt in place of the striped cotton one Sardar Lehna Singh remained the same old Lehna Singh. He did not mind the small rooms nor the harsh noise of the machines, nor the lifeless bundles of fodder. In fact he was very merry in this atmosphere. He was the kind of Sardar who has been described by a Sikh writer as: turn him any way, he will only look like a Sikh.

He was not of a small built. And as proof of his manhood five children were clung to Sardarni like leeches. But Sardarni had her own ways. If she wanted Lehna Singh to do something needing intellect she would call him an idiot and if bravery was required she taunted him with the word impotent. She was ill mannered in great measures. But lots of money and good clothes do not teach good manners. Besides, even if Sardarni was proud of her new wealth but never of good behaviour.

When Sardar Lehna Singh reached Islamabad the communal riots were in full swing. Just as his machines used to chop the fodder unfeelingly the members of one religion were chopping off those of the other religion. Lehna Singh took out his shining *kirpan* just in case he meets a Muslim and he is called upon to give proof of his manhood. But there was not a single Muslim who was alive. The roads had ample proof of bloodshed, and noises of killing and looting could be heard in the near distance. As he moved alertly he saw his friend Gurdial Singh breaking the lock of a house. Sardar Lehna Singh looked at him questioningly.

"I am taking possession of this house." Gurdial Singh looked indifferently at his firiend and continued with his job.

Sardar Lehna Singh secured the loose end of his *pugree* and looked at his friend's house. Suddenly he was reminded about finding a house for himself. As he moved on, just two houses away from his friend's he saw a big beautiful house. Without thinking he broke open the big lock with a brick.

Compared to his small rooms this was a heaven. Perhaps it belonged to a clerk with taste, for in a corner stood a radio and a gramophone. There were not any clothes or jewels, the trunks were open and empty. The owner had perhaps run away to the refugee camp or to Pakistan. He had taken a lot of things but plenty remained that was useful. He put his wrist on his mouth and screamed like a goat to express his happiness. Then he refixed the corners of his *lungi* and started inspecting the things in the house.

He sorted out all that was useful and threw out all that was useless. He locked the house, went over to Gurdial Singh's and requested him to keep an eye on his house. He then went back to pick up his own belongings.

When he reached home he realised that there was no *tonga* available for carting his luggage. He went over to his friend and milk-supplier Ramdhan. Before he started using a truck Lehna Singh used to use his bullock cart for carting the chopping machines. After promising to pay him double the labour charges Lehna Singh was able to persuade him to come along with his bullock cart.

When everything was loaded and they were ready to leave the Sardarni expressed her desire to accompany them. She was advised to stay back till the families of other neighbours had also shifted. After all it is always the women who suffer most during the riots. Besides if she leaves who will look after the courtyard. So many refugees were surging in, everyone could take possession if their place was found vacant. Sardarni agreed but just as Lehna Singh was leaving she suggested that he should take one chopping machine to the new house. Its presence will leave no doubt in the minds of others about the ownership of the house.

Sardarji was very happy with the Sardarni's suggestion. Although there was not an inch of space available in the cart yet one machine was kept on the top of the luggage and tied with a rope.

Just as Sardar Lehna Singh reached his new house he noticed that Sardar Gurdial Singh's wife and children had already arrived. He felt that he had made a big mistake, by leaving his family behind. If this thin and frail man could bring his wife why couldn't he?

He dumped all his belongings in the veranda, locked the house and said to Gurdial Singh, "Please keep watch on my house, I'll go and fetch my wife. She will give your wife company."

Lehna Singh returned in the same bullock cart and asked his wife and children to get ready immediately.

An hour-and-a-half later when he reached his new house in Islamabad, he found that the lock had been broken and all his belongings were missing—only the machine stood like a devoted watchman. He was very worried and he called out to Gurdial Singh. But another Sardarji came out of Gurdial Singh's house. He informed him that Gurdial Singh had shifted to another street into a better house. Sardar Lehna Singh took out his *kirpan* and went towards his house to find out what had actually happened.

Just as he entered the veranda two tall, well-built Sikhs stopped him and, indicating towards his wife and children in the bullock cart, said, "This house is not for refugees. Balwant Singh lives in this house."

Upon hearing the name of its owner Sardar Lehna Singh's *kirpan* automatically slid into its case and the *pugree* became a bit loose.

"Sir . . . I had locked this house . . . all my belongings . . ."

"Get out from here. Go to a court and file a case. You can't claim other people's belongings as your own."

They pushed Sardar Lehna Singh out. Just then Lehna Singh caught a glimpse of his fodder chopping machine.

"Look, sir, this is my machine. You can ask anyone. Everyone around here knows me."

But the Sikhs and Hindus who came out of their houses were all strangers, Lehna Singh could not identify a single familiar face.

One of the Sikhs who had pushed him out, said, "Why don't you say that you need this machine?" And then he turned towards his friend and said, "Kartar Singh, throw this machine out. They are poor refugees, what do we want out of this wretched machine?"

Both of them threw the machine out.

When late at night after two hours of unsuccessful attempts to acquire his belongings Lehna Singh decided to return to his own open courtyard, his wife and children were walking on foot . . . only the fodder chopper was loaded on the bullock cart.

—Hindi short story
Translated by Saroj Vashistha

MOHAN RAKESH

The Rubble King

They had come to Amritsar from Lahore after seven-and-a half years. Coming to attend a hockey match was only an excuse; they were more interested in seeing the houses and bazaars which had become someone else's seven-and-a-half years ago. Some group or other of Muslims were seen strolling down every street, looking at everything with the insistence that this was no ordinary city, but some special centre of attraction.

They reminded one another of how things were in the past as they passed through the narrow bazaars. "Look, Fatehdina, how few *misri* shops there now are in Misri Bazaar! And now there's a *panwala* where Sukhi Bhatiyarin's kiln used to be. Look at this Salt Bazaar, Khan Sahib! Every young girl at this place is really sexy."

People were wearing tasseled turbans and red fezzes for the first time in a long while. A majority of Muslims who came from Lahore were forced to leave Amritsar when they found themselves defenseless during partition. When, after seven-and-a-half years, they come and see unavoidable changes, they are sometimes surprised and sad. "My God! How did the Jayamal Singh Compound get to be so big? Were all the houses on this side burned down? Wasn't Hakim Asif Ali's shop here? Now a cobbler's here instead."

And somewhere, "Wali, how come this mosque is still standing? Why didn't they make it a *gurudwara*?"

Wherever the Pakistani groups passed, the local people watched them curiously. Even now some stepped off the road when they saw the Muslims coming, but others stepped forward and embraced them. Usually they asked questions like: What's Lahore like these days? Is Anarkali as bright as it used to be? I hear Shah Alami Gate Bazaar has been completely rebuilt? Have there been any special changes in Krishan Nagar? Was Bribe Colony really built from bribe money? They say that *burqas* have been completely done away with in Pakistan; is that so?

The personal involvement revealed in these was so great that it seemed as if Lahore was not a city, but a thousand people's relative whose health they were all curious about. The people who came from Lahore were the guests of the whole city that day and the Indians were very happy to meet and talk with them.

Bazaar Bansan was a rundown Amritsar neighbourhood where lower class Muslims used to live before partition. Most of the shops there had dealt in wooden poles and building materials, but these were all burnt down in one holocaust. The Bazaar Bansan's fire was Amritsar's worst, and for some time there was great doubt whether the entire city would not go up in flames. The fire, however, only took hold of the areas neighbouring Bazaar Bansan. One way or another, though, the fire was brought under control; but for every Muslim house that was reduced to ashes, four or five Hindu homes were also destroyed. Now seven-and-a-half years later, there were again some buildings erected from its midst, but in various places there were still piles of rubble. The ruins created a strange atmosphere among the new buildings.

On that day there was not much traffic in Bazaar Bansan because most of the people who had lived there perished along with their homes; those who were saved had fled. Probably there was not a single one among them who had the courage to return. Only one thin elderly muslim man came to that deserted neighbourhood that day; when he saw the new as well as the burnt-out buildings, he felt as though he were in a maze. When he reached the lane that turned to the left, he was about to turn in, but then hesitated and remained outside, as though he did not believe that it was the lane that he wanted to take. On one side of the lane some children were playing *kiri-kara* and further along two women were loudly shouting curses at one another.

"Everything else has changed, but not the language!" the old Muslim said to him softly and stood there resting on his cane. His legs sagged lightly. His *sherwani* was patched in several places a little above his knees. A crying child was coming out of the lane.

He called him over. "Come here, child! I'll give you some sweets; come here!"

He put his hand in his pocket and started to serach for something to give him. For a moment the boy kept quiet but then he again pursed his lips and started to cry. A sixteen-or seventeen-year old girl came running out of the alley, grabbed the boy by the arm and started back into the lane. The child was now squirming to remove his arm as well as crying. The girl picked him up in her arms and held him close and kissed him. "Shut up, you little devil! If you cry, that Muslim will take you away. I'm telling you, keep quiet!" she said.

The old Muslim put the coin that he had taken out to give the child back in his pocket. He lifted his cap and scratched his head and then put the cap under his arm. His throat was getting dry and his knees were shaking a bit. Leaning on the porch of a closed shop out in the street, he put his cap on again. Tall wooden beams were once kept in the place opposite the entrance to the lane where there was now a three-storey house. Two fat buzzards were sitting motionless on the electric wires. There was a little sunlight near the utility poles. He stood for a few moments in the sunlight watching the flying particles. And then he said, "O God!"

A young man came toward the lane twirling his key chain. When he saw the old man standing there he asked, "Why are you standing here, sir?"

The old Muslim felt his chest and arms trembling slightly. He moistened his lips and looking the youth over carefully said, "Son, aren't you Manori?"

The young man stopped swinging his key chain and held it in his fist. He was surprised, "How do you know my name?"

"Seven-and-a-half years ago you were only this tall." The old man tried to smile.

"You've come from Pakistan today?"

"Yes. We used to live in this lane," the old man said. "My son Chirag Din used to be your tailor here. Six months before partition we had built a new house here."

"Oh, Gani Mian!" Manori recognised him.

"Yes, my son, I'm your Gani Mian. I can't see Chirag and his wife and children anymore, but I thought at least I might see the house once again."

The old man took off his cap and rubbed his head and stopped the flow of tears.

"Didn't you leave here long before?" Manori's voice filled with sympathy.

"Yes, my son, it was my misfortune that I left earlier by myself. If I had stayed here, then along with them I also . . ." He stopped in the middle, but he let the tears flow from his eyes.

"Forget it, Gani Mian; what's the use of thinking about all those things now."

Manori held Gani Mian by the arm. "Come, I'll show you your house."

The news had already been spread about in the lane that a Muslim standing on the road was trying to kidnap Ramdasi's son. His sister had grabbed him just in time, otherwise the Muslim would have taken him away. When they heard this news, the women sitting in the alley picked up their stools and moved inside. They called the children who were playing in the lane to come in. Manori and Gani entered the lane where a lone hawker was left, as well as Rakkha Pahlwan, who was comfortably sleeping on the side of the well under a large *peepal* tree. Of course, there were several faces peeping out into the lane from windows and from behind doors. Some gossip broke out in the lane when they saw Gani coming with Manori. No one had any difficulty recognising Abdul Gani, Chirag Din's father, in spite of the fact that his beard was completely white.

"That one was your house." Manori pointed to a far off pile of debris. Gani looked in that direction, his eyes wide open with wonder. He had already accepted the death of Chirag and his wife and children some time back. He was not at all prepared for the shock that he got when he saw the house in such a state. His throat became even drier than before and the trembling in his knees increased.

"That junk heap?" He couldn't believe it.

Manori saw how his face changed colour. He held his arm a little more firmly and a lifeless voice answered, "Your house was burned down during those days."

Using his cane Gani somehow reached the ruins. Now there was only dust in the rubble heap and every now and then a piece of broken or burnt brick stuck out. Everything made of iron or wood had been removed long ago. Only the burnt

frame of a door was somehow left. Towards the back, the black smudges of two burnt almirahs were giving way to the whiteness underneath. After he had looked at this wreck from close-up, Gani said, "Is this all that's left?" And it were as though his knees had caved in. He leaned on the burnt door frame and sat down. After a moment he rested his head on the frame and a moan trickled from his mouth, "Oh, my Chirag Dina!"

For seven-and-a-half years the frame of the burnt door had pushed its head up above the pile of dust, but its wood had badly disintegrated. Some particles fell and were scattered nearby at the touch of Gani's head. Some fell on Gani's cap and in his hair. A worm also fell down seven or eight inches from Gani's feet on the line of bricks alongside an open sewer and wriggled along on top of it. It raised its head to look for a hole in which to hide, but it did not find any. After banging its head on the ground a couple of times, it turned the other way.

The number of faces peering out of the windows had increased manifold. Gossip was that, for sure, something would happen that day: Chirag Din's father, Gani, has come; everything that happened seven-and-a-half years ago is bound to come out. People felt that the pile of dust would itself tell Gani the tale of how Chirag was in the upstairs room eating on the evening when Rakkha Pahlwan called him downstairs. He said that Chirag should come down for a minute to speak to him. In those days Pahlwan ruled the lane. Even the Hindus were all afraid of him—and Chirag was a Muslim. Chirag stopped in the middle of eating and came downstairs. His wife, Zubaida, and his two daughters, Kishwar and Sultana, peered out of the windows. Pahlwan grabbed him by the collar of his shirt as soon as Chirag stepped outside and pulling him toward him, hurled Chirag down on the street and jumped on his chest. Grabbing the hand which held a knife, Chirag screamed, "Rakkhe Pahlwan, don't kill me; please, somebody save me!"

From up above Zubaida, Kishwar and Sultana screamed hopelessly and ran down to the door crying. One of Rakkha's disciples grabbed Chirag's resisting arms and while Rakkha pressed his knees down on his thighs said, "Why are you crying?

Sister-fucker, I'm giving you Pakistan, take your Pakistan!" By the time that Zubaida, Kishwar and Sultana got downstairs, Chirag had already been given Pakistan.

In the neighbouring houses the windows were closed. Those who had witnessed the event shut their doors and absolved themselves from any responsibility for it. Also behind closed doors people could hear Zubaida, Kishwar and Sultana's cries until quite late. That same night Rakkha Pahlwan and his friends arranged for their departure for Pakistan too, but by a different, longer route. Their bodies were found later in the canal, not in Chirag's home.

For two days Chirag's house was continually ransacked. After absolutely everything was stolen, someone set fire to it—no one knows who. Rakkha Pahlwan swore that he would bury alive whoever set the fire because he had decided to kill Chirag just to get his hands on the house. He had even bought the necessary items for the ritual to purify the house. But he could not find out who had done it. Seven-and-a-half years after, Rakkha Pahlwan still regarded that rubble as his fief. He would not let anyone tie up his cow or buffalo there, nor allow anyone to set up a stand. No one could take even a single brick out of the heap without his permission.

People expected that, somehow or another, Gani would certainly find out the whole story. As if just by looking at the ruins he would realise what had happened. Gani scooped out dirt from the rubble with his nails and poured it over himself and leaning over the door frame cried, "Speak to me, Chirag Dina, speak! Where have you gone? Kishwar! Sultana! My children! O my God! What did you do to Gani?"

Tiny pieces of wood were falling from the fragile door.

Someone must have awakened Rakkha Pahlwan, who was sleeping under the peepul tree, or may be he just woke up. When he heard that Abdul Gani had come from Pakistan and was sitting on the ruins of the house, a little phlegm caught in his throat, causing him to cough. He spat it out on the platform around the well. He looked toward the pile of debris and a bellows-like sound came from his chest. He pushed his lower lip out.

"Gani's sitting on his rubble." His pupil, Laccha Pahlwan, came over and sat down next to him.

"How is it his rubble? It's mine!" The phlegm made Pahlwan's voice hoarse.

"But he's sitting there." Laccha had some hidden meaning in his eyes.

"He's sitting and he'll go on sitting. Get the chillum!" He stretched out his legs and put his hands on his naked thighs.

"Suppose Manori told him something, then..." Laccha still had that meaningful look in his eyes as he got up to fill the chillum.

"Is he looking for trouble?" Laccha took off.

Dry leaves from the peepul had fallen down around the well. Rakkha picked up some of the leaves and crushed them in his hands. When Laccha had put the cloth filter around the chillum and handed it to him, he took a puff and asked, "Gani hasn't spoken to anyone else?"

"No."

"Here." Coughing he handed the chillum to Laccha. Laccha saw that Manori was coming over from the rubble heap holding Gani by the arm. Laccha sat on the ground with his feet drawn up to him and started drawing long puffs on the chillum. His eyes fell now on Rakkha's face and now on Gani.

Manori was holding on to Gani's arm and walking one step in front of him, as though he were trying to get Gani past the well without seeing Rakkha Pahlwan. But then Rakkha was spread out on the ground; Gani had noticed him from quite a distance. When he got pretty close to the well, Gani stretched out both arms, "Rakkhe Pahlwan!"

Rakkha lifted his head and squinting looked at him. There was a vague rumbling in his throat but he did not say anything.

"Rakkhe Pahlwan, don't you recognise me?" Gani put his arms down.

"It's Gani, Abdul Gani; Chirag Din's father!"

Pahlwan looked him over from head to toe. Abdul Gani's eyes brightened up seeing him. Under his white beard the wrinkles on his face spread out. Rakkha's lower lip trembled and then in a deep voice he said, "Well, well, Ganiya!"

Gani again stretched out his arms and kept them there even though he did not see any reaction in Pahlwan. He leaned on the trunk of the peepul and sat down on the edge of the well.

Up above in the windows, the spying and gossiping continued undiminished. "Now they've come face to face, so it'll have to come up—It's possible that there'll be some cursing back and forth too—Now Rakkha can't say anything to Gani; times have changed—He's the rubble king! Actually the rubble's not his, nor Gani's. It's government property—He doesn't let any one graze their cows there—Manori's also a coward. Why didn't he tell Gani that Rakkha killed Chirag and his wife and children? Rakkha's not human, he's a wild animal. All day long he roams the street like a wild animal—Look at how thin poor Gani's gotten! His beard is completely white!"

Sitting by the side of the well, Gani said, "Take a look, Rakkhe Pahlwan, at what's left. I went away and left a fine home, and now I've come back to find dust! That's the only sign that people once lived here. If you ask me, Rakkhe, I don't feel like going away and leaving even this dust!"

His eyes became moist.

Pahlwan pulled in his outstretched legs and put the towel lying on the top of the well on his shoulder. Laccha offered the chillum to him and he started puffing on it.

"Tell me, Rakkhe, how did this all happen?" Gani's tears had stopped and his voice was insistent. "You all were with him. You all loved each other like brothers. If he wanted to, couldn't he hide in one of your houses? Wasn't he even that clever?"

"That's the way it is." Rakkha himself sensed that his voice sounded unnaturally hollow. Thick saliva stuck to his lips. Sweat dripped from his mustache on to his lips. Something was pressing down on his forehead and his spine craved support.

"What's new in Pakistan?" The tone of his voice remained the same. His throat muscles were tense. He used the towel to wipe the sweat under his arm and forcing up phlegm, spit into the street.

"What news can I give you, Rakkhe?" He leaned forward, supporting himself on his cane, his voice was not firm. "Ask how I am, but that only God knows. If my Chirag were here, it would be a different story—Rakkhe, I kept trying to tell him to leave with me. But he insisted that he couldn't just go off and leave a brand new home, that this was his own block and

there was nothing to be afraid of. It didn't occur to that innocent lamb that even if there was nothing to fear here, danger could appear from elsewhere! Four people gave their lives to take care of this house! Rakkhe, he depended a lot on you. He said that as long as Rakkha lives here, no one would dare hurt him. But when death finally came, how could even Rakkha stop it?"

Rakkha tried to straighten up becuase his back hurt. He felt a severe pain where his waist and hips join. Inside his stomach something was tightening up and shortening his breath. His whole body was wet with perspiration and there was a burning pain in the soles of his feet. All the while blue fireworks seemed to rain from above and pass right in front of his eyes. His mouth went dry and he seemed to lose his tongue. He used the towel to wipe both corners of mouth and then said, "Dear God, have mercy; only you can help me!"

Gani saw Pahlwan's lips go dry and the circles under his eyes deepen. He put his hand on his shoulder. "What had to be has happened, Rakkhe!" You can hardly bring someone back. May God protect the virtuous and pardon the faults of the bad! Now that I've come and seen all of you, I'll feel like I've seen Chirag. May God keep you healthy!"

Using his cane, he stood up. As he started to leave, he said, "So long, Rakkhe Pahlwan!"

A feeble noise came from Rakkha's throat. He joined his hands together holding the towel. Gani looked around the neighbourhood regretfully and walked very slowly out of the lane.

The peeking and whispering continued for a little while in the window. "When Manori went out of the alley, he certainly must have told Gani everything—How Rakkha's mouth dried up in front of Gani—Now how will Rakkha dare to stop anyone from tying up their cows in the rubble!—Poor Zubaida. Such a good woman—Rakkha's a man without a home. Did he ever care about anyone's mother or sister?"

After a while women started coming out into the alley. Children began to play tipcat in the street. Two teenage girls quarrelled over something or other.

Until late in the evening Rakkha sat by the well coughing and smoking the chillum. Several people who passed by asked

him, "Rakkhe Shah, I hear that Gani came from Pakistan today."

Rakkha gave the same answer each time. "Yes, he came."

"So what happened?"

"Nothing happened. He went away."

When night fell, as usual Rakkha went and sat on the porch of the shop on the lefthand side of the alley entrance. Every day he would shout to those he knew passing by and call them over and tell them about some surefire remedy or give them a stock tip. But that day he told Laccha about rhe pilgrimage he had made fifteen years earlier to Vaishno Devi. Then he sent Laccha away when he returned to the alley, he saw Pandit Lohu's buffalo near the debris and as he usually did, he hit it with a stick and started to drive it off.

After he got rid of the buffalo, he set down on the door sill of the ruin to rest. At that hour the alley was deserted. Even in the evening there was total darkness, for there were no street lights. At the edge of the rubble there was the sound of water running constantly in the sewer. From the dust of the rubble different soft insect noises broke the night's silence.

From out of nowhere a crow came flapping by and settled on the door frame. A few chips of wood were scattered here and there. Whether or not it had anything to do with the crow, a dog growled in one corner, got up and then started to bark loudly. Somewhat frightened, the crow remained a little longer on the door frame and then flapped its wings and settled in the peepul tree by the well. When the crow flew off, the dog advanced a little more and, facing Pahlwan, started to bark again. Pahlwan shouted loudly to scare him off, but the dog only came closer and continued to bark.

Pahlwan picked up a hank of dirt and threw it at the dog. The dog moved off a little, but did not stop barking. Pahlwan cursed at it and then got up and slowly went off to the well where he lay down on the platform. After he left, the dog strolled into the alley and turning toward the well, started to bark again. Sometime later, it stopped barking when nothing seemed to be stirring in the alley. It twitched its ear and returned to the debris where it sat down in the corner and growled.

—Hindi short story

Translated by Steven M. Poulos

MOTI LAL JOTWANI

Kinship with the Soil

There was a large crowd at the bus stop As soon as the bus arrived, everyone rushed to enter it. Vasantani encountered a lot of difficulty in getting out of the bus. After getting down from the bus, he looked around. In the crowd were men and women, though they looked more like animals, suffering from the disease of useless and impotent lust.

It was evening. Evenings of cities are different from those of villages. Evenings, in villages, slowly approach first in the houses, and then on the fields. Evenings of the cities stimulate no urge for returning home. They are devoid of affection and satisfaction. Here, under the dazzling electric lights, even the most personal sentiments and emotions unveil themselves. Everything appears open, uncovered and naked.

Vasantani moved ahead. Federation House was still some distance away. This huge building, near Regal Cinema House, known as Federation House, represented the whole of India in miniature. People from all the states of India, who were living in this city, had founded their cultural societies and associations in the building. When construction work of it was completed, all the storeys of the building were occupied by such societies and associations. Vasantani thought, that since after the Partition, we people were busy in solving the basic problems of food, clothing and houses, our cultural association would have surely gotten some suitable place in this building. Members of our society do not have a separate state of their own, they are scattered in all the other states. They were the worst sufferers of the Partition. Thank God, they at least got the permission of constructing a room on the roof of the building. Since then he had been regularly attending the meetings of their Association.

This glamourous part of the city became too congested in the evening. The place was full of hustle and bustle of the people. Men, dressed in multi-coloured clothes, appeared to be very busy. He thought, 'If one tries to observe them minutely

and may peep into their hearts, he would find that they were trying to kill their leisure time." Man's work, now-a-days, is done by machines, and the time thus saved, is utilized by men in cinema halls or trade exhibitions. In spite of having his own home and family, he gets spare time to look into the affairs of others.

Vasantani, though sixty years old, remained active in his movements and his thoughts and ideas have sobriety and seriousness. He lived in a small rented room on the roof of a two-and-a-half storeyed building, situated in a locality far away from the city. The local people and houseowners mainly lived on the ground floors of the houses. Those who have come from other cities spend their lives in the small rooms built on the roofs. Vasantani himself was not a clerk, but he knew that very few members of his society were big businessmen, the rest being either petty shopkeepers or clerks.

Vasantani thought, 'Bengalis got half of Bengal which fell in Indian territory. Likewise Punjabis got half of the Punjab, but what did Sindhis get? Our whole of Sindh became Pakistan.'

Lost in these thoughts he reached the outer courtyard of the Federation House. Someone put his hand on Vasantani's shoulder. He turned and found Mohan wishing him well with a smile and saying, "Good evening, Vasantaniji. While lying on a bed, under the open roof of the starry sky, you must come to know about some mysterious secret. Surely you would have experienced some such thing last night. Please tell."

Vasantani had become sad since he got down from the bus, and whenever an intellectual experiences some sad moments, he undoubtedly discovers some deep truth. Vasantani became serious and said, "Not actually last night, but this evening I felt that perhaps for years to come, we shall not be able to produce some such literary work which may win us any national or international award."

Proceedings of the meeting were to start at six o'clock and it was nearing six. Many other persons arrived there by various routes. The words of Vasantani were drowned in the hollow laughter of the others. Meetings had already started on the lower floors of the building. While passing by them Ram said, "Mohan, our own language is becoming a hotchpotch of different languages. As we don't have our own Province, we

hear languages of different Provinces, hence, it is but natural that the words of other languages enter in our conversation and writings."

Mohan gave no reply but deep in his heart he felt that as their life is urban so the vocabulary of their language has become limited and juxtaposed, sufficient only to serve their purpose in the cities. He was lost in his thoughts on the theme of his story: 'In fact his heroine truly represents the modern complex life. Though she is newly married, the fresh glamour which shines on the faces of the girls just after the marriage, is not there. Whenever her husband embraces her, she thinks that she should submit to his desires completely, in the next month if not in this month, because by doing so, she would be able to be absent from the school for four months at a stretch, by combining maternity leave with the summer vacation." Mohan was sure that his friends would like his story.

Ram asked, "You have not given any reply . . . what are you thinking " Mohan introduced him to the complexities of his story.

Vasantani was slowly climbing the stairs, holding the railing for support. When they reached the second floor, Ram pulled the last puff from his cigarette and reluctantly extinguishing the half burnt cigarette, said, "Mohan, my story has also the same type of 'tension' but I have written that story in Hindi. Friend, I want to gain popularity in the field of Hindi literature." And throwing the butt of the cigarette, he went to attend the Hindi meeting on the second storey.

Mohan began thinking, 'We had no hand in the partition of the country, then why Ram has been deprived of his own bona fide medium of expression? Ram may be a success in the sphere of Hindi, but what would be the fate of the creative talent of others? Are we destined to remain only insignificant?"

Vasantani heaved a deep sigh. Two or three fellows had caught up with him from behind. Hari told Vasantani, "Why Dada, finding you ascending the stairs slowly in this manner, I feel you are really getting old!".

In reply, only a faint smile, like the dimly lighted bulb of 'Zero Power', burning in the staircase, crossed the face of Vasantani.

On reaching the roof of the building, they found a carpet spread on the floor. How many times their Association had requested the government for some financial help, as was given to other associations, so that the carpet could have been replaced with tables and chairs, but who cares! Today political power was needed even to protect our customs and traditions, and under the changed circumstances, they did not possess that power.

One by one they unlaced their shoes and placing them in a corner, they sat down on the carpet. Vasantani could not sit. He went inside the room and began to see the oil paintings of Shah Lateef, Sachal and Sami. His eyes got wet. All those paintings were the result of the fertile imagination of the painter. In those far off days, the writers and poets avoided giving even the details of their lives, or comments on their works, what to say of their pictures. But such is not the practice today. The pictures of the present-day poets and writers will last through ages. He came out and began looking at the flower pots kept on the terrace. Evergreen flowers were blooming in the flower pots and were looking very beautiful.

As Vasantani remained in front of the flowers, his thinking was interrupted by the arrival of Krishna. Krishna was a man with an ever smiling face. But in his smile, there was sometimes an emotion of sympathy for others and sometimes it hid a sentiment of pity for himself. He greeted Vasantani with a broad smile and said, "Why, Vasantaniji, you are standing here, let us go in and sit."

Vasantani in reply offered a counter question. "How are you, Krishna? Will you please recite a Sindhi Kafi or a Wai?"

Krishna spoke, "To hear Kafi or Wai, vastness like Sindhu Valley is needed. Now-a-days we are living in the narrow lanes of the city. Today, even in Ghazals those small metres are used, which tally with the narrowness of our lives."

Vasantani said with dejection. "So today you will read only Ghazal?"

Krishna said, "Yes, because modern Ghazal is quite capable of bearing the burden of the modern complexities of life. Do you know what I have said in one of the couplets of my Ghazal?"

Vasantani, well aware of the sensitivity of Krishna, asked, "What?"

Krishna continued, "Now the birth of children does not imply any traditional conceptions of filial duties towards the parents. Children are either unwanted or are born as a result of sexual pleasures of the parents and if such children, in the future, do not carry out the traditional duties expected of them, then what is their fault?"

And Krishna betrayed a loud laughter but Vasantani could not join in that laughter, for reasons best known to him. He felt that the life of the people living in the capital or cities like the capital, was totally different from the life of general masses of India. These cities are like roofs of the villages. We are cut off from the ground. Do the skilled workers or farmers also lead meaningless and useless lives? The farmer loves his bullocks as his own sons. Does he also not need a son to take work from the bullocks? Does he also get a son though he never wants him? Do these shepherds, who love their cattle as their own children. not sincerely desire to have their own children?

He addressed to Krishna, "Do you see those flower pots?"

Krishna with wonder, looked towards the flower pots.

Vasantani said, "Those who are present here, on this roof, are just like the flowers in the pots. As these flowers are blooming in different pots, so also, in different States, the smell and beauty of our Art is undoubtedly flourishing and developing. But these flowers are blooming in the limited sphere of their pots and they are kept on the terrace, far above the ground, therefore our kinship with the soil has broken. As such the characters painted by us are all artificial. They are the prototypes of those who stroll through Connaught Place of Delhi or Flora Fountain of Bombay. Have they any individual identity or personality? It appears that they are all lost among the crowds."

Krishna remained gazing towards him. With a deep sigh Vasantani said, "I have no desire to attend the meeting on this roof tonight."

And with long and hurried steps he moved towards the staircase which led to the ground. A horrible idea like lightning

flashed in the mind of Krishna, 'It may not so happen that tomorrow we me may read in the newspapers—A Sindhi writer lost his life while descending rapidly from the staircase of Federation House, in attempting to establish kinship with the soil.'

And the next moment he began to envision some such death.

--Sindhi short story
Translated by K.S. Mathur

GULZAR SINGH SANDHU

Gods on Trial

Noora sat quietly under a mango tree by the tombs of the Pirs. He was absorbed in doing the home task given by his teacher. Rahmte, his sister, was cutting fodder from the Sikh Martyrs' field, near the Pirs' graveyard.

The Martyrs' entombed near our field are supposed to possess great miraculous powers transcending death, fire and time. We of the Sikh religion have profound faith in them. So much so that I was not allowed even to take the school examination unless I pledged an offering to them. My grandfather believed that it was only because of the Martyrs' kind intercession that I never once failed in any examination.

That summer day, I was also sitting with Noora under the mango tree. While Noora was engrossed in homework, I watched Rahmte, cutting fodder from our field. I liked her so much that I felt like talking about her to Noora.

"Of your two sisters whom do you like more? Rahmte or Jaina?" I asked.

"Jaina," he said, naming the elder one that had been married for four years then.

"Why don't you like Rahmte?" said I and was suddenly aware that I could be misunderstood.

"She beat me once, which Jaina never did," he said casually, to my satisfaction, and returned to his book. Assured that I was not misunderstood, I started watching the rhythmic movement of Rahmte's limbs operating the sickle.

Just then something startled a peacock on the Martyrs' *pipal* tree, and it shot off into the air flapping its large wings with a heavy, muffled thud-thud. One of the feathers came off and sailed down to the ground. I was then a keen collector of peacock feathers. As I saw one sailing down in its rich dazzling colours, I threw down my book and ran for it. But it never touched the ground. Rahmte had grabbed it from the air, before I could.

"Hand it to me," I said a little tensely.

"I got it first," she replied coldly.

"None of that!" I threatened, "You have to give it to me."

"Oh, I have to, have I?" she scoffed. "In that case, I shan't!"

"Come on, hand it over and I'll never ask anything more from you." I tried to sound suggestive and grown up. She flushed.

"Take it, there," she said curtly throwing the feather away. She collected the fodder into a sheaf, picked it up and started to go home. I could not take my eyes from her slender figure, straining under the weight of the sheaf. I was left wondering whether I had really offended her.

Back in the graveyard I found Noora's father, the saintly Badru, saying his *Nimaz*. Noora stood by humbly. Both the father and the son had incongruous yellow scarves, the symbol of the Sikh religion, around their necks, for they, along with others, had recently agreed to "conversion." These were the days of communal riots and the yellow scarf guaranteed security to the Muslim minority in East Punjab.

The partition of the country had torn India into two parts and conversion had been made a condition by the Sikhs, for those Muslims staying on in India, in retaliation to a similar declaration by Muslims in Pakistan for any Hindus or Sikhs there. The majority, no doubt, in our area were Muslims, and that too of the orthodox sect of Sunnis. But what could they do? They were in India and whoever did not convert to Sikhism was killed.

After the invitation for conversion a huge number of steel bangles, wooden crescent combs and yellow scarves were procured for an elaborate conversion ceremony. Just when the *prasad* (the sanctified sweet) was being prepared for initiating the Muslims to the Sikh religion, a phlegmatic voice said:

"What good is this initiation, bound by outward symbols? These cannot deter them from continuing to be Muslims at heart!" It was Baba Phuman Singh, pausing to fling a pellet of opium into the hollow cavern of his mouth.

"What else do you advise us to do?'

"Feed them with pork," he said.

"Our own people have been made to eat beef on that side of the border," said another.

Everyone agreed to feed pork to the Muslims gathered for initiation. Four or five pigs were killed and cooked immediately. This ceremony had been carried out in a similar manner in neighbouring villages also.

The Muslims listened and watched with the resigned passivity and indifference of those who no longer cared whether they live or die.

"Our Gurus baptised with *parsad* only," my father whispered to Baba-ji, in mild protest.

"Keep your mouth shut, man. Nothing like silence," he said, and drifted towards the pots of meat to examine the quality.

In a little while all the Muslims were initiated into the Sikh religion. Wearing the five symbols of Sikhism they started swallowing the pieces of pork served to them.

"We have always been Hindus. Only that blasted Aurangzeb made us change " one of them said in a futile effort to seek justification for his acts. Baba-ji, and a few other village elders, sat a little separately from the rest, in their own superior elite group of Sandhus.

"The Maharaja of Patiala is a Sidhu," I heard him say. "Sidhu and Sandhu are equal. The only difference is that our *jagir* provides us only with opium while the maharaja's gives him all the luxury he could dream of." The talk did not interest me.

"Noora and his people are not being baptised?" I asked my father. "Hush!" my father silenced me, "I have delivered all the five symbols to them and they are wearing them. Noora's father is a saintly person and respects us. I wouldn't want him to feel disgraced in public. May be he does not want to take part."

When my grandfather asked about the baptism of Badru and his family, my father managed to convince him that Badru had taken pork in his very presence. To allay any remaining doubts, Father swore it solemnly and thus the whole of Badru's family was also counted among the baptised.

And where was the lie in it? That day when I had demanded the peacock feather from Rahmte she was wearing a yellow *duppatta* on her head and a steel bangle on her wrist. Her father Badru and her brother Noora too were wearing yellow

scarves around their necks and steel bangles on their wrists. Both were performing the Nimaz. They would not have dared to pray the Muslim way had there been a witness. But then the only person present was myself and I was his pupil. They knew well that I would not tell anyone in the village that they were praying the Muslim way. How could I, who till the third standard had done my sums with the help of Rahmte?

It is still all so clear before my eyes—that day, Rahmte carrying the sheaf of fodder, Badru and Noora praying. The long henna-dyed beard of the holy man touched the ground as he bowed in prayer. His loose Lucknowi shirt was a little dirty. I stood at some distance watching them all, when I heard sudden shouts of "*Boley so Nihal, Sat-Sri Akal.*" It was the Sikh cry and it sent us running for our lives in great terror. In the general panic Noora stumbled and fell on the ground. The running hoofs came to a stop and many a spear was jabbed viciously into his body. He lay there with his entrails hanging out. It was the last I saw of him.

I looked at the riders in yellow and blue and stood there dazed. They had already closed in on Badru. The saint pleaded with folded hands flourishing his yellow scarf and the steel bangle on his wrist to show he was a Sikh. A Nihang Sikh with fox-tail moustaches, playfully struck the wrist which was raised to exhibit the bangle, and cut it clean from the elbow. When Badru raised his other hand in abject imploration, the tyrant struck that off too.

"Send this bug as well to Pakistan," someone shouted and ran towards me.

Sending one to Pakistan was a common phrase for killing a Muslim.

"He's a Sikh one, you fool," a voice checked him. It was the Nihang Sikh who had speared Noora.

From his saddle he lifted me up and put me in his lap.

I do not know what happened after that, for I lost consciousness.

When I came to my senses next day I was lying in bed in the verandah. My mother's eyes were red and swollen with crying.

"He's saved, don't you worry. It was only shock. He is just a child after all." Baba-ji was talking to my mother.

"It was almost the end of him," my mother said wiping her tears and rubbing my limbs.

"What a dreadful shock for you, my son! God protect you, God bless you," she said wiping my face with her *dupatta*.

"Bless and be blessed, afterwards, first give offerings to the Martyrs who saved his life," said Baba-ji, and everyone agreed to this proposal. They started making preparations for the Martyrs.

Chokingly, I told my mother about Noora's death and asked her in a trembling voice if she knew anything about Rahmte. She told me in tears that Jaina and Rahmte were abducted by the crusading rioters along with other Muslim girls of the village. Many were murdered, about fifty of them. Whoever was seen with a new yellow scarf and bright steel bangle was killed.

Meanwhile the whole of the village made ready to offer *prasad* to the Martyrs. Though it was a quiet evening, everyone was frightened. Baba Phuman Singh was absolutely stunned. He was almost out of his wits. Just a while ago he was informed that his life-long friend Ghanshiamdas had also been killed by mistake. He had been carrying a yellow scarf to one of his Muslim friends out in the fields, when he was surprised by the rioters who killed him, taking him to be a new convert. They did not wait to check who was who. They were busy people. They had to visit and plunder other villages too. For them the sight of a yellow scarf was enough to tell them of 'converts'.

While praying at the Martyrs Field, Baba-ji (my grandfather) was still thinking of Ghanshiam Das. Yes, true, he had to die some day. But this sudden and uncalled-for death had given a new uncertainty to people, including Baba-ji. It meant that anyone who was carrying a yellow scarf, even if he was a Sikh or a Hindu, would not be spared. Where then was the guarantee of saftey to converts? In fact those who had not accepted Sikhism were safer, for they were cautious, not caught so easily, and hence not killed. Thus, absurdly, avowed Muslims were escaping while Sikhs were being slaughtered!

Even though he was singing aloud the praises of Guru Gobind's sons, the Five Beloved Ones, and the Forty Martyrs, his heart was crying over the calamitous riots. Towards the end when he was reciting verses in honour of those who had

shared their wealth, fought sinners, offered sacrifice for the faith, suddenly his legs buckled beneath him. The mention of 'sacrifices for the faith' choked his throat. His *Khunda* fell off on the ground. The rest of the prayer was completed by my father. Having finished the ceremony my father told me to go and offer *prasad* to the Martyrs. As I placed it on their tombs, the crows from the peepul tree nearby came cawing and swooping and ate it up in no time. "Let the Martyrs remain hungry," I said to myself.

As my father distributed the *prasad* to everyone and was about to leave, Baba-ji came forward and held him there by his arm.

"Tell the boy to put some on the Pirs' tombs too," he said pointing towards the Pirs' graveyard. Looking in that direction I remembered Noora. The peepul in the field reminded me of Rahmte who had frowned at me under it. Had she done it in love or in hatred? I would never know now.

"What do you mean?" father asked Baba-ji, a little puzzled —"on the Pirs' tombs?"

"You remember the massacre," Baba-ji whispered to Father, after taking him beyond the boundary of the field. Perhaps he dared not say it within the Martyrs' domain, afraid of their curse on his unbelief.

"Yes, I remember," father said bitterly.

"Those who were initiated have been killed, haven't they?"

"So what?" whispered my father still puzzled.

"Those who did not agree to initiation are saved, you know that."

"I don't understand," Father said, frowning perplexedly.

"Well, if you don't, I can't help it," snapped Baba-ji, a little irritated by my father's denseness.

"Listen," he tried again, whispering very low to prevent the Martyrs overhearing, "Those who remained Muslims were saved, were they not? Well, who knows if tomorrow the Pirs don't turn out to be more powerful than our Martyrs?"

Suddenly enlightened, I ran and offered *prasad* at the Pirs' tombs. Father did not stop me.

Perhaps the insinuation in Baba-ji's remarks still escaped him.

—Punjabi short story
Translated by Raj Gill

N. G. GORE

A Palmful of Water : A Palmful of Blood

Not even a small cloud was visible in the sky. It looked as if fire was falling from above. Outside yellow sunshine had spread. One train was moving very slowly towards Allahabad, as if a fly was crawling on a lump of raw sugar. The train was overloaded with people. To get to the toilet one had to step on each other's hands, feet or the luggage. By the time we reach Allahabad a strain of crowd will enter the train and by the time we reach Delhi no one will have the comfort of reaching the toilet, of this everyone was fully aware. Just as the train turned its direction each passenger in the compartment became alert as if he was on the war front. Those sitting near the windows pulled the shutters down. In that one moment a feeling of togetherness took birth, as if they belonged to one family.

Before the train stopped on the Allahabad platform we were surrounded by soldiers in green uniforms. Someone shoved the door. A Marwari had spread his huge bedding near the door from Mogul Sarai onwards. He started screening a trapped mouse. All of us started shouting: "Why are you coming here? There is no place in here." But no one paid any attention. Punjabis in beret caps, and Sikhs with moustaches and beards entered the compartment. They opened all the windows, through these their friends handed over their luggage. Guns, kitbags, beddings, big boxes and what not. While the luggage was being handed over through the windows a number of soldiers were coming in through the door. We had been travelling for three days, our clothes were stinking with perspiration, our bodies were filthy and now this torture to top it all.

I was very irritated and said, "Why can't they go to the compartments reserved for these people? Why inflict this torture on us?"

"Who can stop these army people! Thank Heavens! they have not thrown us out," said an old Muslim who had been chewing tobacco for a long time.

A middle-aged woman, with her face covered with her veil, said, "You are right. These army men have neither any shame nor anything resembling humanity."

They paid no attention to us, and were busy arranging their belongings. On their big boxes they kept the smaller things and made enough standing room for themselves. Their uniforms were wet with perspiration. Our condition was like that of chickens packed in a basket. A Sardarji stood up and asked in his heavy voice, "Is everything all right?"

"Yes, Sardarji."

"Very good. Now you can sit down comfortably," he loosened his belt and said to himself. "The war has ended. After five years we will see our homes."

He could not complete this sentence through the jungle of his moustache and beard. His eyes were wet. He bent forward a bit and then became quiet. The Muslim sepoy sitting next to him said, "Do not worry, my friend. By God's grace we have returned alive and well, now all will be all right."

Sardarji did not reply. He stroked his beard and automatically muttered, "God is great! God is great!" A small fair arm touched Sardarji's shoulder and a small child's affectionate words were heard, "Uncleji, Uncleji."

We all turned and looked at the golden hair, the naughty eyes of the child. The fair child had fixed his rabbitlike fists on the Sardar's shoulder and was calling out:

"Uncleji, Uncleji."

Sardarji turned around and held the fists in his strong hands. He kept looking at the kid. The child stared right back, stubbornly. With this soft touch the massively built sepoy was melting like snow internally. He found himself incapable of speech. Earlier, the child was looking at the uniform, the beard, and the jungle-like moustache in a scared manner. Now the fear was gone. He stuck his fingers in the beard and said, "Mother, look—a tiger!"

The mother who was covered from head to toe in the burqa scolded, "Anwar, don't misbehave."

But the Sardarji was thrilled. He asked, "If I am a tiger, what are you? A rabbit?"

We were all watching this scene of love and affection. But I was wondering: when did this Muslim woman and the child

come in? Perhaps they came with this crowd, effortlessly, they must have been pushed in.

We were still watching the little boy whose body resembled that of a rabbit. He was asking questions one after the other.

"When will our train leave?"

"Very soon."

"Why are you wearing this dress?"

"Army people always wear clothes like this."

"Is this a gun? What do you do with it?"

"What do you do with a gun? We shoot with it . . . . like this."

"Whom do you shoot?"

"Men."

"Yes, but why?"

"Because they trouble us. That is why."

Anwar's mother was well aware of the fact that he will never stop asking questions. She said: "Look here, Anwar. Stop this nonsensical talk. Otherwise Sardarji will say this child is very naughty and is troubling us."

He was not the one to be scared so easily. He put both his hands in the Sardarji's, bent towards his mother and teased her. "And then Uncleji will shoot me with this gun." He was laughing, and his hair was flying like a chicken's top.

Automatically Sardarji pulled Anwar towards himself, embraced him and said, "Don't be mad. Can anyone shoot a child who is chirping like a nightingale."

To divert his attention he asked, "What will you eat?"

"Nothing," replied Anwar.

Suddenly he felt thirsty. He went to his mother's lap and asked for water.

The mother showed him the empty water can and explained to him, "You know that we dropped all the water because of the crowd. Don't insist for water, my son. You will get it when we reach Lucknow, my good boy."

Immediately Sardarji stood up and said, "Give me your water can, Sister, I will go and fill it up."

Just as he was about to step out his friend called out, "Uddam Singh, the train is about to leave. I have got enough water in my bottle. Here, I will give you some."

But by this time Uddam Singh had jumped out and was running towards the tap. Moments later the train ,whistled and started moving slowly. The passengers near the window could see that Uddam Singh was trying to catch the train. Some of his friends were advising him to join them at the next station, others were asking him to run faster.

Anwar was unable to comprehend if he had done anything wrong, or had Uncleji fallen out of the train. All the naughtiness had disappeared from his eyes. He was very thirsty, his cheeks had become red due to heat. The train had picked up speed. The Punjabi Muslim sitting nearby said, "Now he cannot come in." He handed over his water bottle to Anwar. Anwar had hardly brought it near his mouth when he heard, "Anwar, my son, here is the water."

At once Anwar removed the bottle from his mouth, took the water can from Sardarji and started drinking it. Sardarji's thick fingers were stroking the silk of Anwar's hair.

With great respect for this scene the Muslim sepoy removed his water bottle. A farmer said, "Love is very strange."

Sardarji wiped the water drops from Anwar's lips as if he was removing dew drops from the rose petals. "My Laxman must be this old." Tears welled up in his eyes and his throat became dry and heavy.

This happened two and a half years ago. The Independence Day fell two days before—India's first Independence Day. In Jamia Milia School at Karol Bagh preparations were being made. All the class rooms were decorated with multi-coloured flags. The children were excited. We saw their paintings and other art objects. The children even looked after the canteen. The future citizens of India were prepared in this school. This was not a school but a dream of Doctor Zakir Husain and his co-workers. As the bell rang we all gathered in the school-hall. The children were busy rehearsing the next day's programme.

To begin with, they sang the flag song of Jamia Milia. And then the usual programme followed. I has about to get up and go, but the verses of poet Iqbal forced me to sit down again. A face like white rose, and eyes as golden as the barley flowers held me. He was singing.

> We are the nightingales of this garden. And this
> garden is ours. Fair face! golden eyes!

I tried to remember something. He has singing:

> Oh, flowing Ganges, I remember your shore
> where our caravan stopped.

Why cannot I remember? Where have I seen him?

> We are Indians,
> India is our country.

The poem was over I asked the teacher seated next to me, "Who is this boy?"

"He is Anwar Husain. A very clever boy," was the reply.

"Is he from Lucknow?

"Yes! Do you know him?"

"No. I just wanted to know."

Anwar! Now I could remember. On my way to my house I felt I had found something I had lost long ago. My heart was very light. That hot afternoon . . . an overcrowded train . . . impatient soldiers wanting to reach their homes quickly . . . that Sikh and Anwar. I felt I was still in the train. I was so lost in my thoughts that I did not hear the horn blown by the bus driver.

He braked and I was just about saved. The Sikh from the corner shop came running towards me, "Babuji, Babuji." The driver gave one dirty look to me, saw my khadi clothes, refrained from abusing me and went away. The Sardar held my arm and asked jokingly, "Are you planning to commit suicide?"

"No." I laughed back.

"You have just been saved. What were you dreaming about?"

Suddenly I realised who he was. "Uddam Singhji, what are you doing here?"

He was surprised that I knew him. He took me to his shop and kept asking himself, "How strange! I cannot remember having ever met you. Come, Babuji, come to my shop. Come, sit down."

"How is your Laxman? Must be going to school."

This surprised Uddam Singh no end. How does this stranger know me so well? He felt very guilty.

"Laxman is in Pindi." He was again trying to remember where and when we had met. I reminded him of that journey and asked:

"Do you remember Anwar? He is here in Jamia. I saw him today."

"That son of a Muslim? Where else can he be besides Jamia?"

I looked at Uddam Singh, the love and affection he had exhibited in the train was missing. I felt that these army people and our rivers in Deccan were quite similar, flooded during monsoons, otherwise they are all sand. I probed him further:

"He was a lovely child, was not he?"

He handed a cup of tea to me and said, "He was lovely but he was son of a snake."

I put my cup down and asked, "What do you mean?"

"The meaning is clear, Babuji. He is the child of a Muslim, never forget this fact." His eyes were shining like a *kirpan*.

The intoxication provided by Independence had disappeared. It looked as if the tree that had promised lots of mangoes had been ruined by dew drops. The nation and independence had hardly been united in sacred ties when the temple was destroyed. Amritsar, Sialkot, Lahore, every village, every township was under fire, some had even burned and turned into ashes. The God of Destruction had appeared, his feet were moving from one place to another. The serious sound of his drum was shaking all the four minarets of Delhi. His laughter was crippling our ability to think. The mask of humanity worn by our faces was melting. Somewhere from inside suddenly eyes of jackals had grown. The fingers had grown tiger's nails, suddenly we had acquired the teeth of the wild pigs, and the phallus of a goat.

Till today what had been the most precious thing for a human being? The love of his beloved. What had been the purest thing in the world? The tears of a mother. What had been the sweetest thing for a human being? The laughter of a child. Then why are we now crushing all these under our feet? Why are we bathing in their blood, and dancing absolutely

naked in front of the world? Why are we torturing each other's mother's breasts, the wive's thighs, and strangling the throats of each other's children? Why?

Fire had been smouldering Delhi. The city had not been charred totally. It was weeping at the news received from Punjab. The eyes of Hindus and Sikhs were red because of these news. The same news was filling up Muslims with fear and terror. Gradually the rumour started spreading that a Masjid had been destroyed. Someone had been stabbed in Subzi Mandi, the house of a Muslim had been stoned. These were the clear signs of a wind storm, the first drops of a heavy monsoon. The flood of refugees from West Punjab came to Delhi via Sonepat. Before they could relate their stories the hearts of the people in Delhi were already on fire, now they turned into sparks. Each word ultered by the refugees made the listeners restless. The atmosphere echoed with the words, "Revenge! The revenge of blood is blood!"

Groups of people collected at each corner, at each turning. Discussions were held and then the crowd disappeared. It appeared as if Delhi was flooded with a vast number of strangers. Or may be familiar faces had suddenly started looking unfamiliar. People either remained quiet, or stayed at home, or abused each other. The women and children had nearly stopped coming out on the roads.

But there was a lot of activity at Uddam Singh's shop. All those men were not his customers.

One day I saw a lot of people standing around him. He was sitting like a rock. No one was talking. I could feel a black spot on his mind. I felt like an animal who can smell another animal and find out what's on the other's mind.

I had also changed lately. I called out: "Sardarji, Uddam Singh ji!" With his knotted hands he looked at me icily. I asked, "What has happened?"

"The same that was expected," he laughed bitterly. "The same that is going on in Pindi and Sialkot, Babuji."

"What do you mean?"

"I am totally ruined, Babuji." He put his strong arms on my shoulders, and he addressed not only me but all the inhabitants of Delhi, "Tomorrow will be the Doomsday in Delhi. All snakes will be crushed."

True enough. The next day turned out to be the Doomsday in Delhi. Muslims along with their wives and children tried to escape and hide. On the way they were attacked. The houses were burnt. While all this was going on in the city, where was I? What was I doing?

Did I have any objections? If you want to know the truth, the answer is, no. I did not kill anyone, nor did I look anybody. I did not abduct any Muslim girl. The reason for all this was that I had a weak mind, I was an impotent man.

The cruelties other men indulged in made me very happy. That is why I was going around the city, as if I was watching a play from the wings. If a man used to watching a deer-hunt is suddenly asked to watch a lion being hunted, his blood is bound to boil. Or watching animals indulge in intercourse excites the veins—that is what I felt.

One afternoon I felt a spectator was hiding inside me. The others stabbed and I drenched my hands in the blood. The others disrobed the girls and I pressed their breasts... my mind was participating in all that was happening.

At two in the afternoon I heard that there had been disturbances near Jamia Milia. I felt as if my intestines had stretched. I went towards Jamia and saw that the school was on fire. The leaves on the nearby trees had burnt, and were flying around along with some papers. The crows and pigeons were scared and were flying away. The voices of the people could be heard. Nearly three hundred Muslim women, children and men were moving towards us—in fact they were crawling. Their feet were too weak. The road was lined with people on both sides, and they were abusing the luckless Muslims, they were laughing at them, but no one had attacked them so far.

At the corner stood Uddam Singh's shop. The entire picture changed when the group reached the corner. About fifty men attacked the group with sticks, knives, spears and swords. The men started running away. The women clung to their children and screamed. Blood started flowing as if pans containing water had been tumbled. The pile of dead bodies because bigger and bigger. I heard a heart-rending scream. I saw that one of Uddam Singh's iron hands was holding on to the hair of a child, and the other was piercing the chest of the child with a blood drenched *kirpan*. The

boy's eyes looked dim, his lips had turned white and had shrunk. He wanted to say something, but words were not escaping his lips. I recognised him. It was Anwar. Just like a gladiola flower, Anwar, just iike a nightingale. Somehow he must be saved. I wanted to shout to Uddam Singh, "Leave him. He is Anwar, our own Anwar."

But before I could say I heard Uddam Singh had stabbed Anwar. This was the silken hair that Uddam Singh had once stroked, for this very Anwar Uddam Singh had brought water to drink—the same Anwar had dropped a palmful of blood and was now sleeping peacefully. His lips had again become red, and his cheeks soft, his hair was shining. It appeared that he will now get up and put his arms around Uddam Singh's shoulders and say:

"Uncleji . . ."

—Marathi short story
Translated by Saroj Vashishth

KULWANT SINGH VIRK

You Know Me?

Seeing me buying fruit and getting them packed in a basket, he approached me.

"You want this basket to be carried?" he said softly.

From a man of his appearance I did not indeed expect this loud voice. A cursory glance at his face was sufficient to assure me that he was not altogether in possession of his wits, so insipid and spiritless was his appearance.

I replied in the negative. I did not like him to walk beside me. If he could still lay a claim to being a man, it was a rather worn out and battered specimen of mankind that he presented. He did not have more life in him than a grain of mash has whiteness on it. His brow, eyes, lips, neck, clothes, feet, all seemed to have been pressed in one and the same stroke. Not one of his features made an appeal to an onlooker. One would not expect a reply to anything one said to him. The man who carries your luggage and walks beside you, even a common porter, is after all a companion. You cannot get a man to carry your luggage and walk beside, in front or behind in such a detached manner as if it was a pack animal or bus. His being does make an effect, however slight, on you.

My refusal had absolutely no effect on him. Perhaps he did not hear it even. I could not trust any of his powers, hearing, speech or sight. As he did not move away the shopkeeper, perhaps to please me, began to display some temper at him. I was sorry to have been the cause of this insult to him. After all I needed somebody to carry the basket. He would do for that, I argued with myself relenting, and told him to.

As we walked, I grew impatient to know what it was that had so worn him out. I have seen people depressed by hunger and poverty. Many of them had, on the contrary, got some strength from it, had become more conscious. But no, he was not one of those. Perhaps he did not even know that he had faded. At every step I feared his being run over.

"Are you a native of these parts or have you come from that

side?" I said, to break the ice. By 'that side' I meant West Pakistan.

He did not catch my point. He did not seem at all anxious to answer my query that I might make. Either he did not hear what I said, or did not understand. This second event seemed to be nearer the truth. External sounds, instead of entering his consciousness and eliciting a reply, slipped off him like water off a duck's back.

I needed considerable effort on my part to scrape out these few bits of information from him:

"Have you come from Pakistan?"

"Yes."

"From which place?"

"Sangla."

"What do you do here?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Where do you put up at nights?"

"I sleep in the street here."

"Where do you eat from?"

"From any eating shop; two-anna worth of it."

"Have you nobody, wife, son, daughter, brother, sister, to call your own?"

"No, none," and he shook his head to reinforce his meaning.

"How much can you make daily?"

"Just a few annas, five, six, or seven."

So he had come from Sangla, a place which, I had heard, could boast of a small hill, from where stone was hewn for spreading on railway tracks. For that reason, the place is called Sangla Hill.

"Did you ever climb up the hill there?" I asked to resume conversation.

"What?"

"You have come from Sangla, haven't you? Did you ever go up the hill there?"

"You know me?" he said, bouncing with cheer. This mention of the hill in connection with him seemed to have injected life into him. He did not remember that he had himself told me of his having come from Sangla.

"Yes, I have seen you there." I did not want to deprive him of his cheer.

"Is that so?" His face was beaming with satisfaction. He scrutinized my person from top to toe, and then turned that scrutinizing look on himself. It was for the first time, since we had sort of started walking beside each other, that he had made an attempt to look at anything.

"You've seen me there?" he repeated what I had said.

"Yes."

"But I don't remember having seen you."

"You don't, evidently. But I have seen you there."

By this time we had reached home. I handed him his wage.

"One thing more," hesaid.

"What?"

"Give me some old clothes to were."

On account of our newly formed acquaintance, I could not say 'no' to him. I found an old suit of shirt and pyjamas for him, and he departed from me in a cheerful mood. Even his step was somewhat agile now.

A few days later one morning he was standing at my gate, shouting to call me out. As I came out I was surprised to see him. He was very much changed, wearing the suit of clothes I had given him. His hair was combed and well set. His face, and all its features, were quite right. Nearby stood a cycle rickshaw.

"Would you like to go out?" he asked me. He had now begun plying a rickshaw, and wanted to take me out on his transport.

"No, friend. I am going away and am in fact packing. I shan't be back before a week or even more. Then I may go out with you."

After about ten days he came again. I had to sit in his rickshaw to please him. "Where would you like to go?" he asked.

"Wherever it pleases you to take me," I said.

He stopped the rickshaw in a lane. He opened a locked door and we went in. A *charpai* was the only furniture in the room. A lantern hung on a peg in the wall, on which were pasted some pictures of cinema stars, evidently torn out of old magazines and periodicals. I sat down on the *charpai*.

"Is this house your own?" I asked.

"I am paying rent for it. I thought if I took you out I must have a place to bring you to. I make two or even three rupees

a day from this rickshaw, out of which I hope the rent will be paid."

"What were you doing on that side?"

"On that side I tried many things. First of all I tried a hand-loom. Gave it up to keep goats and sheep. Sold them off to start a small grocery shop. Then my father died. I had no other kith and kin in the village, and shifted with all my belongings to Sangla, to leave them all there with the Partition. And now here I am where I have found a friend like you."

"You must marry," I advised him, feeling the loneliness of his surroundings.

"I had a wife on that side. One day I happened to give her a few slaps. She began to make a hue and cry, inviting the neighbourbood with her cries. "You didn't have to spend anything on me," she protested. 'That is why you beat me. If I had cost you a sum, you wouldn't. The next day she left for her father's place, never to return to me. If I marry again now, I'll pay a price for my wife. Even otherwise I don't think I can get a wife now without having to pay a price. After years of coming over to this side, did I find here one who knew me? You may do whatever you please or are obliged to do, nobody here minds or cares. Don't know where all the people I knew have passed on to. Marry I must now, I am only waiting for the necessary money to come."

'It you had begun thinking of that ever since you came to this side, you might have by now saved enough to pay for two wives," I said humouring him.

"I didn't quite take in what had actually happened. It was all like coma. The first time I feel conscious since I crossed over to this country is now. I was an utter outsider here."

—Punjabi short story
Translated by Sant Singh Sekhon

MAHEEP SINGH

The Water under the Bridge

When the train left Lahore, suddenly my heart trembled. We were now going towards that side where some twenty years ago there was such a conflagration in which lakhs were consumed, and lakhs still carried their scars till today. I felt as if our train was entering some long, deep, dark cavern and we were confining our everything to this darkness.

We were about three hundred pilgrims. Among us were many women and children too. We had pilgrimaged to every Gurdwara in Lahore. We had been welcomed so enthusiastically that now our pilgrimage to Panja Sahib did not seem likely to hold out any possible danger. Yet who could say when the animal in man would wake up to swallow all possibilities?

While thinking all this I looked at my mother. She was gazing outside, her elbow resting on the window and the palm of her hand supporting her chin. The crops had been harvested and plain fields could be seen till far distances. She sat there with no expression in her eyes—I felt as if this now plain land had overwhelmed her heart. Then I looked towards other passengers. They too were in the grip of a profound quiet. It was difficult to fathom the cause of this sudden melancholy over everybody.

"Mother, you must be quite familiar with this route," I said interrupting her reverie. "You must have passed this way many times."

My mother looked at me and smiled. This smile had been acquired after having lost everything. She said, "I remember each and every station on this line. But today this region looks so alien. I am travelling this way after so many years. When I travelled before, after crossing Lahore there would be a strange sense of delight. As we would be approaching Sarai Alamgar, our station, I could see each and every face with Mind's eye. So many people used to be there at the station."

For Mother old memories had been revived. My father

had set up his business in U. P. All of us brothers and sisters were born outside Punjab. I remember that my father would come to Punjab only about once a year but Mother would come two or three times. The youngest of us accompanied her and as far as I remember, my younger sister used to accompany. her.

In those days when Punjab had been partitioned and the five rivers of the Punjab had been turned crimson with the blood of savagery, Mother decided to go to Punjab again. Everybody opposed it as if Mother was going to jump into fire. And her going like this indeed was like jumping into fire. But we all, including Father, knew that it was not easy to dissuade Mother from her determination. She laughed away everybody's objections and came back in about twenty days' time. She had booked most of our luggage from our village home and brought along with her her spinning wheel and the wooden curd-churner.

Then the whole Punjab was on fire. Houses, villages and cities were being engulfed in that conflagration. When it was over, it seemed that the plain and fertile land stretching till Peshawar had cracked between Amritsar and Lahore, and the region on the other side had perhaps moved still further, one did not know how far. We all forgot that on the other side of the abyss was our village on the pucca road or in the rear was a canal, and the river Jhelum, jumping, darling like a maiden, wending on its ecstatic way.

Today, with my mother, I was going to that side which was so much ours yesterday and so much alien today.

I was looking over the pages of a book. Mother asked, "Does this train halt at Sarai?"

I fiddled with my fingers and said, "Yes perhaps, but it will reach there at dead of night when we shall be fast asleep. We shall not even know when the train passes that station. And, moreover, who is there anyway whom we can call our own?"

Mother's face wore an annoyed expression. "For you there was nothing there even before?"

My answer had hurt my mother. I kept quiet and once again busied myself in the book.

It was dark. Mother took out something to eat from a cloth-bag. One of my distant maternal uncles was also with

us. We all three ate and prepared to sleep. My uncle started snoring within minutes. I relaxed myself, but Mother kept on sitting as before.

After some time, I woke up to find that Mother was staring fixedly as before at the darkness outside. I looked at my watch. It was 10.30 p.m. I said, "Mother, why don't you also lie down for some time, please?"

"All right," she said and also stretched herself on the seat. In that half wakeful state I had a dream. I do not remember it exactly but in that nightmare I was feeling some sort of anxiety—something wet, something red seemed to be whirling all around me, and I felt as if my feet were splashing through something red. I suddenly woke up frightened, Mother was shaking me up. Her hands were trembling with some strange anxiety and excitement.

"What is it?"

"What is this noise outside?"

I looked outside. Our train had halted at a small wayside station. There was only the faint dim light of the lamp-post on the platform, and there was a strange noise. I was frightened. All those stories which I had heard as how twenty years ago the rioters had stopped trains and massacred the passengers, flashed through my mind instantly. My uncle too had been shaking me up.

"What is the matter?"

Only then did I hear. Somebody from the crowd was shouting, "Anybody in this train belonging to Sarai?"

"What station is this?" I asked Mother.

"Sarai, our station," she replied.

Again the voice came, "Anybody from Sarai?"

I looked at Mother. Her countenance carried full confidence.

"Ask them what is the matter?"

I leaned out of the window. Many people were moving to and fro and shouting, "Anybody from Sarai?"

I called a man who passed by me, "What is the matter?"

"Does anybody from among you belong to this village?"

"Yes, we are from this village," my mother said a little eagerly.

"Are you from Sarai?" he asked with emphasis.

"Yes."

Immediately the word was passed around. Many people who were moving hither and thither collected in front of our compartment. Then there was a chorus of voices.

"Yes, we are from Sarai," Mother said loudly, "from this very village."

There was a kind of an upoar in that crowd. A voice came, "Whose wife are you?"

Mother looked at me. I replied, "My father's name is Sardar Moola Singh. She is my mother."

"You are Moola Singh's son?" many voices repeated simultaneously, "and you his wife, sister-in-law of Ravel Singh? Is everybody well?"

And many hands stretched towards us. The men there were inquiring about our relatives' health and were giving us small cloth-bags which contained gifts from the village. Unable to speak, Mother and I took the cloth-bags and placed them on the seat. In no time our seat was heaped up with these small bags.

I was looking at all this wonderstruck. Mother was adjusting her *dupatta* over the head and folding her hands again and again. Her lips quivered with pleasure. She could hardly speak and it seemed as if tears would trickle down any minute.

The guard showed up the green light and took out the whistle from his pocket, but three-four persons surrounded him.

"Mister, let the train stop a few minutes more. Don't you see this lady belongs to our village ?" And one of them brought down his hand holding up the green light.

"Sister, how is Sardarji? Why haven't you brought him along for Panja Sahib's *darshan*?" an elderly Muslim was asking.

Mother covered her head even more with her *dupatta* and could hardly say, "Sardarji is no longer alive."

"What? Sardar Moola Singh passed away? What was ailing him?"

Mother remained silent. I answered, "He developed an ulcer of the stomach. One day it burst suddenly and next day he died."

"He was a very noble man. Heaven be with him!" one of them said by way of condolence. For a few moments everybody was silent.

"Sister, are your children well?"

"By wahe-guru's grace, they are well," Mother said softly

"Sister, you must come here with your children." one said and many repeated after him, "sister, you people must come back now."

There was a chorus of voices from the platform.

"Come back."

"Return."

I heard my uncle frowning behind me, "Rogues, first they killed and drove us out; now they say that we should return... villains!"

But the people standing on the platform hadn't heard him. They kept on repeating, "Sister, you should return here with your children. Sister, tell us when will you be coming? You must be remembering your village, don't you? Sister, do come back..."

Mother couldn't speak. She could only fold her hands in greetings and adjust her *dupatta* on her head from time to time.

In the distance, the guard was showing the green light and whistling.

The engine hissed and roared and started puffing out of the station. The crowd also started walking alongside our compartment.

"All right sister, *salaam*; *salaam*, son; give our *salaam* to Sardar Ravel Singh, our *salaam* to everybody..."

Mother's hands were folded. Some words, surcharged with the condition, were escaping her lips. The train gradually picked up speed. Both of us, our heads leaning out of the window, kept folding our hands. The crowd waved and shouted from where they were standing.

The train came out of the station. I pushed the cloth-bags aside and looked at Mother, expecting her to say something.

Tears were trickling down her eyes and they twinkled. She was wiping her tears with the end of her *dupatta* again and

again, but the dam had burst and the water flowed and flowed.

Our train had reached the Jhelum bridge. In the stillness of the night the roar and the clatter of the train was hard and fast. I looked through the window at the bridge outside. I had heard that it was a very strong structure. I was looking at that bridge of iron and concrete in the darkness. My sight was slipping down and down where it was pitch dark, but I knew it was water there—the clear, gushing water of the Jhelum river which was flowing under the structure of iron and concrete—the bridge.

—Hindi short story
Translated by the Author

VED RAHI

The Death

The mist gradually became more and more intensive. Fog increased and it enveloped the whole environment. Now I was not able to see anything . . . nothing at all.

The *tonga* was advancing towards the city, and jolting in it, I tried to come out of that fog. Now my vision was improving and out of the mist, outlines of some figures had begun to appear. In those figures I could see the signs of that life which was delicate like a glass doll, innocent and true like the words of children—but that life was cut off from me; now it was impossible for me to get it back once again.

It happened many years ago.

I was busy spinning.

We were taught many things in that school : spinning, weaving, agriculture and other handicrafts. I was very fond of spinning. I was in Class Three at that time.

Suddenly I saw my teacher standing near me. A new boy was holding him by the finger.

"This is Saleem," said the teacher. "Now he will be sitting with you. Teach him spinning." Saying this the teacher went away. I made Saleem sit beside me.

He was much taller than I. His complexion was very fair. He had a broad face and on his forehead were some golden locks. Saleem was exactly like the boy in the coloured picture of our book which was on the opposite page of a poem:

> I am a good boy
> I am the silky good boy.

I started giving him lessons in spinning. Suddenly I saw his nose running. Spontaneously the word "Oh" slipped out of my lips. He immediately sniffed the snot. I laughed. He blushed.

"Madan," I heard Saleem calling me. I stopped. I turned back and found Saleem running towards me. Four or five boys were chasing him. No sooner did he come near me, then he caught me by the arm. "They are all coming to hit me."

I was the monitor of the class. The boys saw me and stopped. Mohan was in front of them. If he wished he could have caught Saleem and me by the hair and dashed us against each other single-handedly.

"What has he done?" I asked the boys.

"He pushed a passer-by." Raju wailed.

"What harm has been done?" I said.

"That man gave me a beating."

Saying this Raju broke into tears.

Mohan challenged Saleem, "Why don't you come forward."

Saleem got scared and came closer to me.

Asserting my command I spoke, "Look here, if you fight like this I will have to report the matter to the teacher," and then I myself suggested, "Don't say anything to him, I am taking him to the teacher."

The boys went away pacified. I took Saleem to the teacher and said, "The boys of the class have become very mischievous. It is necessary to have an additional monitor. Please appoint Saleem as assistant monitor.

We were then in Class Four.

During the hot noons of the summer under the scorching sun, we used to slip away secretly from our homes to bathe in the canal. The two paisas, which we used to get from our parents in the morning while going to school, we used to save to spend at this time. I used to purchase Kakari with those two paisas, so that we could play with it in the water. Continuous bathing for three or four hours used to stimulate our hunger. Then Saleem used to purchase grams and bread with his two paisas. We used to enjoy grams and bread along with Kakari.

Saleem dreaded water, hence, like a donkey used to take dip in the shallow water near the bank. He never wentin the deep waters, and that is why he could not learn how to swim. I was very much fond of taking dips in the deep waters. Once I was getting ready to plunge into the water from a road running over the canal. Saleem was standing on the bank and was watching me dive. While diving, God knows what happened but after plunging into the water, instead of coming out I kept on swimming under the water for quite a long distance. After covering a lot of distance, I raised my head

over the surface of the water. Suddenly I saw Saleem drowning in the deep water. I at once came out and rushed towards him and saved him with great difficulty. He had swallowed a lot of water. After a long time when his breathing was regularised, he spoke, "When you did not come out of the water for a long time, I thought you had drowned. Only to take you out, did I jump from above."

I laughed like anything.

For my mischief, Saleem remained angry with me for many days.

Perhaps it happened after the above incident.

Once many boys, were under the plum bushes, on the bank of the river Tavi. All of them had filled their pockets with plums. Saleem and I, had both climbed up a high tree. We were about to descend, when all of a sudden, a boy shouted, "Snake!" The boys disappeared in a moment as if they had never been there. We could not get down from the tree early enough to run away with the boys. We shrank with fear and were stupified. We were sitting so motionless and quiet as if by our slight movement that unseen snake would pounce upon us from somewhere. We were unaware of the position of the snake. After a long time I saw the cobra sitting on a piece of rock on the right hand side of the tree, at a distance of about seven or eight yards from the root of the tree. I was startled, but, seeing the snake so far away, I had gathered some courage also. "Saleem !" I whispered with fear. Terrified, he looked towards me. I said, "Look, the snake is sitting there. It is far away." Saleem nervously looked in that direction. Finding the snake far away, he crept to the branch on which I was sitting. We both sat quite close to each other. With one hand we gripped each other and with the other we kept our hold on the tree. We felt somewhat free from that mortal fear due to our closeness. We concentratedly looked towards the snake and found that the snake was holding something in his mouth. Either it was some small rat or a big lizard. We became interested. Finding the snake's mouth on the far end, we had this consolation also that the snake had not seen us. Suddenly, hearing a peculiar sound, we grabbed each other, but before we could find out what had happened,

we fell down. The branch of the tree had broken. It was a blood curdling fall. Thinking that the snake would surely attack us now, we hurriedly got up. We could not think of our injuries, we dare not look towards the snake. We ran for our lives. Even after clearing the bushes, we kept on running. The black shadow of fear was chasing us. After covering a long distance we became breathless, and we had to stop. Slowly we climbed up the bank, but fear was still there. Perhaps we were afraid of the idea that if the snake would have bitten us then what would have been the condition of our family members.

"Madan, why don't you come to our house?" asked Saleem one day. At that time we were in Class VII. On his invitation I went to his house.

"*Adabarz*," I respectfully wished Saleem's mother. She embraced me and kissed my forehead. How nice she was! I was surprised to see her. She said, "Saleem always talks about you. For a long time I had been telling him to bring you some day. Now sit down, I will bring milk for you."

Saleem took me to a big room.

"Is he your friend?"

"Yes, sister," said Saleem.

His sister was sitting on the carpet in the centre of the room. She had a milky white cat in her lap.

"She is my elder sister, Madan."

I raised my hand in salute. When I sat facing her she suddenly threw the cat on me. I sprang up nonplussed. She and Saleem both began to laugh. I also enjoyed it very much. After that I was introduced to his younger and elder brothers. I liked them all.

I used to go there frequently, but I could never invite Saleem to my house. Saleem never questioned why I never asked him, but I felt very much embarrassed. I knew fully well that my mother considered Muslims to be untouchables. She used to avoid contact with any Muslim or untouchable even while walking on the road. Once my elder brother brought a Harijan to the drawing room and wanted to offer him tea, but Mother flatly refused to serve tea.

Whenever Saleem came to my house, he always stayed outside except for once or twice, when he sat in the drawing room.

He never drank even water, though perhaps I never offered it. This helplessness of mine always used to pinch my heart.

"Madan, my father is admitting me to Military School," Saleem said very sadly. That very day the result of our Class VII had been announced and we both had passed.

I said, "I have to take admission in High School."

"I also wanted the same, but my father has admitted me in to Military School."

That day we talked for hours on the banks of the canal. The next day he went to cantonment. From then on he had to live there. After a few days when I went to his house, his mother, embraced me, and began to weep. She said, "Son, now Saleem has gone away from me, will you also stop coming here?"

"I will be coming here off and on," said I. That day I found everyone very sad.

For some days I carried on my visits. One day when I went there, Saleem's mother very lovingly told me, "Son, now you stop coming here."

"Why?" I was very much surprised to hear her.

Mother, pulling me nearer, said, "This is a Muslim locality, your coming here is dangerous."

I did not say anything. After that I did not go there. The communal riots had broken out in the city. Every day one or two murders were committed. As these riots gained momentum, the condition of the city deteriorated. Looting and arson also began.

At that same time with Independence, Pakistan came into existence. As if the fire had broken out all around, groups of ruffians armed with naked swords, guns and pistols began moving on the road and lanes; it became impossible for gentlemen even to come out of their houses. All the time cries and sounds of firing were heard. I used to think about Saleem. He was away from his relatives. Would his father have called him back? Then I used to think about what was the condition of his father and mother? What had happened to his brother and sister? Were they able to leave for Pakistan?

I felt extremely bad the day when I heard that on the pretence of sending them to Pakistan, many Muslims were taken to places where they could have been shot dead easily.

I was unable to understand anything. Though I was extremely nervous, I could never anticipate even the slightest harm for Saleem or his family.

At that same time, the tribals invaded Jammu and Kashmir. People began to flee. I was sent to Amritsar, alongwith a fleeing neighbour, by my relatives. There my maternal grandfather had come with his whole family after losing everything in Lahore. There also I kept on remembering Saleem and his family.

After six months when I returned to Jammu, I found a complete change. Red caps were seen everywhere in place of black caps. Alongwith the flag of the Solar dynasty, the red flag bearing the symbol of plough was also flying. People were tirelessly shouting the slogan, "Long live the tiger of Kashmir !"

During this period my father had shifted to the other house. Just after I reached Jammu, I enquired about Saleem and found that he was still in the hostel. My joy knew no bounds.

Immediately I hired a *tonga* and went to cantonment. No sooner had Saleem seen me then he came out of his barrack. We shook hands. Our eyes were wet and hearts were full of emotions.

I asked about the welfare of his family. He informed me that during those days his father had arranged a jeep and then alongwith the whole family, had escaped. He had not had time to pick up Saleem from the cantonment. His father had sent a message from Sialkot of their safe arrival there.

I thought of Saleem's mother. How much she had wept when Saleem was admitted in Cantonment School. I could imagine her condition when she had been asked to sit in jeep leaving Saleem alone here. A shiver ran through my whole body. I told Saleem, "Come and live with us now."

"I am alright here, and my journey to Pakistan can be arranged at any moment, so I should stay here."

Saleem was right. I kept quiet. After some time he spoke again, "Madan, before I leave for Pakistan, I wish to visit your house."

"Let us go today." I insisted.

"No, I have to receive permission first to go to any place from here. If you come here day after tomorrow, at this very time, I will go with you."

It was Saturday. Saleem and I were heading towards the

city in a *tonga*.

I was very happy because I was taking Saleem to my house. Saleem was also feeling peaceful which was evident from his face. We were sitting quite close to each other. Saleem said, "Madan, I will write to you from Pakistan. Will you reply?

"Certainly," I said. "As soon as you reach there, you send a letter. Convey the welfare of all to me. Please tell your mother that Madan remembers her very much. Convey my regards to your father. Your sister must have tamed more cats there. Most probably your brother will still be dreaming of becoming a pilot."

While talking thus, I looked towards Saleem and found tears rolling down from his eyes. I put my hand on his shoulder. He began weeping bitterly. The *Tonga*-driver also turned back and looked at us. Then Saleem became silent himself. He began smiling on his own sentimental nature.

"Oh Madan, your house is on that side," he asked as we entered the lane.

"I forgot to tell you," I said. "we have changed our house. We have purchased this new house. The previous house was a rented one. Previously a Muslim family used to live in this house. That was quite a big family. They were all murdered by the people. Only one boy of the family could survive, because during those days he was in Srinagar. Now he has also gone to Pakistan and before leaving for Pakistan, he sold this house at a cheap price."

By that time we had reached the door of the house. After finishing my story I looked towards Saleem and was stunned. A dark shadow had covered his face. He had stopped outside the door. I realised my mistake but I could not think of anything. Without understanding anything, abruptly, I said, "Come Saleem, come."

Slowly he followed me in. I had no courage left even to look at him. God knows what he was feeling. Whether his legs were trembling or not I did not know, but I was feeling very much dejected. I was feeling a burden on my heart, a feeling of suffocation was there, I was feeling guilty, I did not know why?

I took Saleem to a room on the upper floor. Mother had

gone to village that day, so I was not worried. I had taken my sister into confidence that she would not inform Mother about Saleem taking tea in the house. She quickly prepared the tea, I ran to the market and brought lots of eatables. I was perhaps thinking that when Saleem would tell his mother that he had tea at Madan's place, she would be extremely happy. But now that enthusiasm had died down. I was feeling that perhaps I was deceiving myself.

I went upstairs with the tea and eatables. Perhaps the door had been closed by the strong wind. Holding the tray with both hands, I pushed the door by a forceful kick. Saleem, who was sitting in front of me, was startled, as if there was an earthquake. He was badly perspiring.

We could drink only half a cup of tea each. Saleem had difficulty in swallowing even half cup. All the eatables lay there untouched.

"Madan, now let us go," said Saleem.

"Yes, let us go," I also replied.

After coming out of the house, Saleem started walking very swiftly. When we reached the road, we took a *tonga*. It took an hour to reach the cantonment, but during that one hour neither of us spoke. The terrible silence was suffocating. It seemed as if a haze had covered our eyes through which we were unable to see anything. It had benumbed our hearts.

Getting down from the *tonga*, Saleem spoke, "I am going"

I remained sitting in the *tonga*. I could not speak. After getting down from the *tonga* Saleem looked towards me. A shadow of panic had set in his eyes. For some time we both gaped at each other.

"Madan!" His voice was heard by me, as if, it was coming from far away.

I also got down from the *tonga*.

He caught my arm and in a panic-stricken voice said, "Madan, can you murder me?"

Then he shouted, "No, no, Madan, you cannot kill me..." And having shouted this he ran towards his hostel. He went inside the hostel while I remained standing there stupefied for a long time. I was at a loss to understand how it had all happened.

—Dogri short story
Translated from Hindi by K.S. Mathur

SHEIKH AYAZ

Neighbour

[Sheikh Ayaz is the foremost poet of Sindh. This story was published in June 1947, after the partition had been announced. This story is of historical significance. At that time some progressive people wanted the Hindus to stay back in Sindh (Pakistan). The slogan 'Jai Sindh' was used for the first time in this story. To-day the same slogan is being used as 'Jiye Sindhi.' Two of Ayaz's poetry collections and three books have been banned by the Pakistan Government.]

While Khanu the barber was cutting hair, the National Guard was parading . . . Left-right, Left-right. The young men, dressed in Khaki, were drenched with perspiration. They were proud, strong and carefree. After the haircut Sham Das looked towards them. His face registered fear, hatred and helplessness. "Khanu, who is this person? The one who is carrying the flag with the stars and the moon and is leading those men?" Seth Sham Das' voice was fear-laden.

"He is Salar Khan Mohammed." "Khanu," the Seth had full faith in him, "What are they saying? Are they going to start riots?"

Khanu—a member of the Muslim League, with his heart full of the greatness of Islam—always respected and cared for his customers. He replied,

"Sethji, how can they start any disturbances! They are only parading."

"But my friend, they can go to Rama Musti or Wahid Baksh's place for exercising. Why all this left-right, left-right, right in the middle of the road? I am taking my wife and children to Jodhpur tomorrow."

Khanu had been hearing this kind of talk for the past three or four days. He had read about the disturbances in Bengal and Bihar in the "Alabhid" and "Sansar Samachar." Frightening tales of horror and destruction. Humanity was being vanquished. A brother playing holi with his brother's blood. Women being mutilated and raped, children being despatched

to the unknown—Valley of Death. The same was happening in Lahore, Bombay, and at the borders. He had seen photographs in the newspapers. Many a times he thought about the cruelties committed by the Hindus of Bihar on the Muslims. They shed the blood of our brothers. The women who had never come out of 'Purda' were insulted. He wondered if the riots would start in this city too, after the Second of June. Are we going to avenge the killing of Bihari Muslims here? For example, should I cut the throat of this Seth with this razor? His heart trembled at the thought.

Although Khanu was a barber, when he, dressed in his palm beach pants and went strolling down Lakhi Darwaza in the evenings, no one could imagine that he was an ordinary barber. Most of the College Students of Shikarpur were friendly with him. His shop had magazines of all the colleges of Sindh. He kept a good stock of Hindi and Urdu magazines. His shop was decorated with photographs of Ashok Kumar and Prithvi Raj Kapoor. He could hold his own in any discussion on literature and films. He also stocked many kinds of fancy powders and oils. This always attracted a lot of school boys. Khanu was friendly with the college boys and with the uneducated sons of Hindu seths and Muslim landlords. These boys wore pants and talked about film actors. They were also interested in hunting and wandering. There were two or three who believed in Bolshevism. They came to the shop often but seldom paid attention to Khanu. They talked among themselves. Yesterday they were here for a hair cut.

"Sindh belongs to the Sindhis. The identity of the Sindhis as a nation is in danger. These Punjabis, Gujratis and the Biharis want to snatch away our culture, our language, our business and our land. It is our duty to put an end to this ailment right away. The Gujratis are in full command of the Sindh Congress. And the Muslim League is distributing free meals to the Biharis and Punjabis. They are not concerned with the hungry dying Sindhis," said one of them.

Another man who was a Hindu said, "I would rather die with my Muslim brothers in Sindh than go and live in Udaipur, or Jodhpur. My soul is attached to this country. The roads,

the gardens, the people of this place live in my soul. Without Sindh I am like a dead body."

This was the first time Khanu had seen such a large-hearted Hindu. He listened to him carefully. He was excited and said, "Jai Sindh." Khanu hearing the slogan "Jai Hind," which reeked of Hinduism, had always felt that some one had cut up his razor. But when he heard "Jai Sindh" he felt as though fountains of rose water had sprung up and his brain was filled with the perfume.

"Suppose disturbances break out in Sindh tomorrow, what will I do?" thought Khanu, "Will I cut the throat of this Seth with my razor? Sethi's son goes to the local college and also comes here for a hair cut."

Khanu had often met these people at the Sindhu river during the Navroz celebrations. They had asked Khanu to come over and sit with them. There was a lot of activity all around. The Sindhu river was overflowing, the waves were beating against the bridge and everyone was thrilled. That day Khanu had sung some songs, with his hand on his ear: "Chole Bari Ningari ... (Hey, you young girl in a Kurta ...)" The atmosphere was filled with love. There was no difference between the Hindus and Muslims. Everybody was enjoying the enchanting music. Everyone was giving the beat to the music. Later everyone went for a swim in the river. While swimming they were eating mangoes. Khanu remembered all this and thought, the flowing river was impartial to both the sects. It was not as if the water could or would drown the Hindus and let the Muslims swim across. Besides, the same sun was shining equally on the heads of both the communities. Both took dips into the same water to cool off their heads. It was not as if the sun gave shade to the Muslims and burnt the Hindus. If nature did not differentiate between Hindus and Muslims who was he, the creator of this universe to do so? When the master does not treat them any differently how can the people do so? Khanu's brain was transformed into a page from an Urdu magazine. He was drenched in the colour of the literature he had read. Khanu was thinking that after mixing so freely with these people and their children how can he kill them.

Whenever Khanu went to Shahi Bagh with his Hindu friends to hear folk songs or to watch a play or a dance

performance and whenever Bhagat sang the line, "If I die take my body to my country, Mali," Khanu wished to die at that moment. He wished the leaves of the large Bargad tree to keep fluttering. He wished his grave should be made beneath this tree, he wanted the leaves of this tree to fall on it, and the cool breeze of Shahi Bagh to gently blow over them. So that every time Bhagat sang, his lovely voice and the smell of the flowers should tickle his soul. He wanted to sing in his grave and even if the angels took him away to the heavens he would somehow escape and return to the voice of Bhagat and the teasing smell of the flowers. These sentiments were not exclusively Khanu's. Whoever heard these words whether a Hindu or a Muslim, felt the same way. Can the Hindus leave Sindh? How will they hear the poems of Shah Latif? How will they forget the smell of Sindh?

Khanu had heard some songs on the radio. He did not like them. In fact he had hated them. It sounded like the language of the ghosts. How can anyone enjoy a foreign language? We have always loved the poetry of Sindhi Shah, always lived on the Sindhu river, how can we go and start living somewhere else?

He knew of cases where Hindus and Muslims were woven into each other like warp and weft. Sindh was one nation with one culture. These thoughts made Khanu's brain work quickly like the hair-cutting machine.

In the evening when Khanu was returning home after closing the shop, he saw a number of carriages going towards the railway station. These people were leaving their birth-place and going to a far off place. A far off place which did not have Shah Latif, Sami, Zinda Pir, Bhagat or the fair of the twelfth day, or the Raag of the Chaudhavin. They were going to an unknown place, the language, the dress and the customs of which were unfamiliar.

But... thought Khanu... only a couple of rich Seths can hope to go away. They have their bunglows in Jaipur and Udaipur. They have money. But what about the poor clerks, the accountants and the teachers? What will they do?

The next morning when Khanu was brushing his teeth he heard the fisherwoman. His wife came out to buy some fish. At

the same time Pesu Ram's mother came out and said, "Jeebal buy a whole piece. We will share it."

While Jeebal was watching it cut into two, Pesu Ram's mother said, "I have heard that there is a lot of hatred being spread. Muslims are going to start riots. If this happens, I will come and live with you, Jeebal."

Khanu said teasingly, "I belong to the Muslim League and I wear a Jinnah cap. You should be afraid of me."

"Do not talk like that, Bhaiyya. You will always remain Khanu Bhai for me. How can you kill us? You often say that neighbours are like our own fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. You always send us Phiru on Id and share our sweet bread during Sheetla. How can you forget all this? But even if I die by your hands I will be happy and satisfied." Pesu Ram's mother also reminded him of the famous line said during a fight between a mother, brother or sister: "You can kill me, my brother."

Khanu wondered – can I kill this woman? She is asking for refuge. Can I kill her? No. Never. It cannot be. If the Hindus in Bihar have killed the Muslims, Pesu Ram's mother has nothing to do with it. She has always been our neighbour. Both of us have played together in our childhood. Both of us have always used the same tap for water. How many times Khanu had helped her pick up her pitcher of water. How many times his kite had fallen on her roof and she had always come running with it to return it. Besides she had helped Jeebal during her childbirth. How can we kill her? No. No. Never. We cannot have any rioting in the country of the Sufis. Someone whispered in his ears, "Jai Sindh."

Who can be so cruel as to kill a neighbour and a helpless person?

Suddenly the mist surrounding his mind cleared off—like a clean shave!

—Translated from Hindi by Saroj Vashistha

AMAR JALIL

Holi

He came running into the house as was his habit. He hung up his school bag and went to the kitchen.

I was watching him from my window. He is hardly five or six years old, but his body, soul and nerves are full of mischief.

He is my youngest nephew. I adore him. He is very handsome, just like the Chinese dolls. Bhabi often dresses him up in coloured clothes. He looks really good in these fancy clothes. I have named him 'Holi' because of his colourful dresses.

He sat down to eat without washing his hands. Perhaps he was very hungry. As he sat down I said, "Holi!"

"Yes Chacha."

"You have not washed your hands!"

"I will wash them now."

He put the bite down and went to the wash basin. His affection for me was a little more than the love I felt for him.

He wiped his tiny hands and sat down to eat. After a couple of bites he remembered something.

"Chacha—"

"Yes, my son."

"Chacha, why do you call me Holi?"

"Because you are a very good boy, that is why."

"My new teacher wanted to know why I was known as Holi."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her that my Chacha has given me this name. My teacher even told me the meaning of Holi. How can a Christian lady teacher know the meaning of Holi. Anyone who has not played Holi with coloured water cannot know the meaning of Holi. Even then I wanted to know, so I asked." "What did she tell you, my son?"

Holi raised his tiny innocent hand and said, "Teacher said that Holi means pure."

The teacher was right. Holi means pure... when water is thrown on each other with love and affection it becomes pure.

But Holi is too innocent to understand the sentiments behind my calling him by this name.

"Holi means pure water." He was confused. The teacher had said that the word meant pure. The word water was confusing him.

"Chacha what is this water like?"

"Colourful! like a rainbow" I explained to him. "You fill up coloured water in squirting guns and when you throw it on each other with affection it is called holi."

"What is the colour of this water?" He put his hand on his left cheek and asked.

"Red, green, pink, and . . .!" Suddenly I felt a lump in my throat. My voice became heavier.

"Who plays such games?"

"We used to play. Holi my son, we used to play." I tried to suppress the pain in my heart. Mohan . . . Prakash . . . Purshotam . . . Indira and . . ." My eyelashes were moist. The old wounds became new. How can one forget the past?

Holi was deeply interested in the story of this colourful water.

"Sindhu used to look like a bride in a rainbow coloured sari. Just about everything, the crossings, the balconies, every thing was transformed into a rainbow and Holi . . . you know Indira used to come to our house and every year she drenched Amma, Baba, Bhaiyya and myself with the colours. She always threw sky-blue colour on us . . .such a beautiful intoxicating colour it was! It was so lovely that I cannot even explain it to you, Holi!"

Tears came into my eyes as if they could extinguish the smouldering fire inside my heart. I wiped my eyes. I did not want Holi to see them. Quickly he left his chair, came near me and embraced me with his tender arms. "Come Chacha, we will also play with colours."

My wounds deepened. The pain increased. Trying to stop my sobs, I said, "We do not have that coloured water now, Holi. We don't have that water now."

Holi's face fell. I pulled him close to my wounded heart. I felt a throbbing pain in my heart.

—Sindhi (Pakistani) short story
Translated from Hindi by Saroj Vashistha

BHISHAM SAHNI

We Have Arrived in Amritsar

There were not many passengers in the compartment. The Sardarji, sitting opposite me, had been telling me about his experiences in the war. He had fought on the Burmese front, and every time he spoke about the British soldiers, he had a hearty laugh at their expense. There were three Pathan traders too, and one of them, wearing a green *salwar* and *kameez* lay stretched on one of the upper berths. He was a talkative kind of person and had kept up a stream of jokes with a frail-looking Babu who was sitting next to me. The Babu it seemed came from Peshawar because off and on they would begin to converse with each other in Pushto. In a corner, under the Pathan's berth, sat an old woman telling beads on her rosary, with her head and shoulders covered by a shawl. These were the only passengers that I can recollect being in the compartment. There might have been others too, but I can't remember them now.

The train moved slowly and the passengers chatted away. Outside the breeze made gentle ripples across the ripening wheat. I was happy because I was on my way to Delhi to see the Independence Day celebrations.

Thinking about those days it seems to me that we had lived in a kind of mist. It may be that as time goes by all the activities of the past begin to float in a mist, which seems to grow thicker and thicker as we move away farther into the future.

The decision about the creation of Pakistan had just been announced and people were indulging in all kinds of surmises about the pattern of life that would emerge. But no one's imagination could go very far. The Sardarji sitting in front of me repeatedly asked me whether I thought Mr. Jinnah would continue to live in Bombay after the creation of Pakistan or would he resettle in Pakistan itself. Each time my answer would be the same, "Why should he leave Bombay? I think he'll continue to live in Bombay and will keep visiting Pakistan." Similar guesses were being made about the towns of Lahore and Gurdaspur too, and no one knew which town

would fall to the share of India and which to Pakistan. People gossiped and laughed in much the same way as before. Some were abandoning their homes for good, while others made fun of them. No one knew which step would prove to be the right one. Some people deplored the creation of Pakistan, others rejoiced over the achievement of Independence. Some places were being torn apart by riots, others were busy preparing to celebrate Independence. Somehow we all thought that the troubles would cease automatically with the achievement of freedom. In that hazy mist there came the sweet taste of freedom and yet the darkness of uncertainty too seemed continuously to be with us. Only occasionally through this darkness one caught glimpses of what the future meant for us.

We had left behind the city of Jhelum when the Pathan, sitting on the upper berth, untied a small bundle, took out chunks of boiled meat and some bread, and began distributing it among his companions. In his usual jovial manner he offered some of it to the Babu too who was sitting next to me.

"Eat it, Babu, eat it. It will give you strength. You will become like us. Your wife too will be happy with you. You are weak because you eat *dal* all the time. Eat it, *dalkhor*."

There was laughter in the compartment. The Babu replied something in Pushto but kept smiling and shaking his head.

The other Pathan taunted him further.

"O *zalim*, if you don't want to take it from our hands, pick it up yourself with your own hand. I swear to God that it is only goat's meat and not of any other animal."

The Pathan sitting on the berth above joined in too: "O son of a swine, who is looking at you here? We won't tell your wife about it. You share our meat and we shall share your *dal* with you."

There was a burst of laughter. But the emaciated clerk continued smiling and shaking his head.

"Does it look nice that we should eat and you should merely look on?" The Pathans were in good humour.

The fat Sardarji joined in and said, "He doesn't accept it because you haven't washed your hands," and he burst out laughing at his own joke. He was reclining on the seat with half his belly hanging over it. "You just woke up and immediately started to eat. That's the reason Babuji won't accept

food from your hands. There isn't any other reason." As he said this he gave me a wink and guffawed again.

"If you don't want to eat meat, you should go and sit in a ladies' compartment. What business have you to be here?"

Again the whole compartment had a good laugh. These passengers had been together since the beginning of the journey, a kind of informality had developed amongst them.

"Come and sit with me. Come, rascal, we shall sit and chat about *Kissakhani.*"

The train stopped at a wayside station and new passengers barged into the compartment. Many of them forced their way in.

"What is this place?" someone asked.

"Looks like Wazirabad to me," I replied, peeping out of the window.

The train stopped for a short time only, but during that stop a minor incident occurred. A man got down from a neighbouring compartment and went to the tap for water. He had hardly filled his glass with water when suddenly he turned round and started running back towards his compartment. As he ran the water spilt out of the glass. The whole manner of his dash was revealing to me. I had seen people running like this before and knew immediately what it meant. Two or three other passengers too, who were queuing at the tap also began running towards their compartments. Within a matter of seconds the whole platform was deserted. Inside our compartment, however, people were still chatting and laughing as before.

Besides me the Babu muttered: "Something bad is happening."

Something really had happened but none of us could figure it out. I had seen quite a number of communal riots and had learnt to detect the slightest change in the atmosphere; people running, doors shutting, men and women standing on house-tops, an uncanny silence all round—all these were signs of riots.

Suddenly the sound of a scuffle was heard from the side of the back-entrance to the compartment. Some passenger was trying to get into the compartment.

"No, you can't come in here," someone shouted. "There is no place here. Can't you see? No, no, go away."

"Shut the door," someone else remarked in the compartment. "People just walk in as though it was their uncle's residence."

Several voices were heard, speaking simultaneously.

As long as a passenger is outside a compartment and is trying desperately to get in, he faces strong opposition from the inmates. But once he succeeds in getting in, the opposition subsides and he is soon accepted as a fellow traveller, so much so that at the next stop, he too begins to shout at the new passengers trying to get in.

The commotion increased. A man, in soiled, dirty clothes and drooping moustaches forced his way into the compartment. From his dirty clothes he appeared to be a sweet-vendor. He paid no attention to the shouts of protest of the passengers. He squeezed himself inside and turned around to try and haul in his enormous black trunk from outside.

"Come in, come in, you too climb," he was addressing someone behind him. A frail thin woman entered the door and she was followed by a young dark girl of sixteen or seventeen. People were still shouting at them. The Sardarji had got up on his haunches.

Everyone seemed to be shouting at the same time: "Shut the door. Why don't you?" "People just come barging in." "Don't let anyone in." "What are you doing?" "Just push him out, somebody . . ."

The man continued hauling in his trunk, while his wife and daughter shrank back and stood against the door of the toilet, looking anxious and frightened.

"Can't you go to some other compartment? You have brought womenfolk with you too. Can't you see it is a male compartment?"

The man was breathless and his clothes were drenched with perspiration. Having pulled in the trunk, he was now busy collecting the other sundry items of his baggage.

"I am a ticketholder. I am not travelling without tickets. There was no choice. A riot has broken out in the city. It was an awful job, reaching the railway station . . ."

All the passengers fell silent except the Pathan who was sitting on the upper berth. He leaned forward and shouted, "Get out of here! Can't you see there is no room here?"

Suddenly he swung out his leg and kicked the man. Instead of hitting the man, his foot landed squarely on the wife's chest. She screamed with pain, and collapsed on the floor.

There was no time for argument. The sweet-vendor continued to assemble his baggage into the compartment. Everybody was struck silent. After pulling in the heavy bundle he was struggling with the bars of a dismantled *charpai.* The Pathan lost all patience.

"Turn him out, who is he anyway?" he shouted.

Another Pathan sitting on the lower berth got up and pushed the man's trunk out of the compartment.

In that silence only the old woman could be heard. Sitting in the corner, she muttered abstractedly, "Good folk, let them come in. Come, child, come and sit with me. We shall manage to pass the time somehow. Listen to me. Don't be so cruel . . ."

The train began to move.

"Oh, the luggage! What shall I do about my luggage!" the man shouted, bewildered and nervous.

"*Pitaji*, half our luggage is still outside! What shall we do?" the girl cried out, trembling.

"Get down. Let's get down. There is no time," the man shouted nervously, and throwing the big bundle out of the door, he caught hold of the door-handle, and hurried down. He was followed by his trembling daughter and his wife, who still clutching at her chest was moaning with pain.

"You are bad people!" the old woman shouted. "You have done a very bad thing. All human feeling has died in your hearts. He had his young daughter with him. There is no pity in your hearts . . ."

The train left the deserted platform and steamed ahead. There was an uneasy silence in the compartment. Even the old woman had stopped muttering. No one had the courage to defy the Pathans.

Just then, the Babu sitting next to me touched my arm and whispered agitatedly, "Fire! Look! There is a fire out there!"

By now the platform had been left far behind and we looked out towards the clouds of smoke rising from the leaping flames.

"A riot has started! That's why the people were running about on the platform. Somewhere a riot has broken out!"

The whole city was aflame. When the passengers realised what was happening, they all rushed to the windows to get a better view of the inferno.

There was an oppressive silence in the compartment. I withdrew my head from the window and looked in. The feeble-looking Babu had turned deathly pale, the sweat on his forehead was making it glisten in the light. The passengers were looking at each other nervously. A new tension could now be felt between the passengers. Perhaps a similar tension had arisen in each compartment of the train. The Sardarji got up from his seat and came over and sat down next to me. The Pathan sitting on the lower berth climbed up to the upper berth where the two Pathans were sitting. Perhaps the same process was on in other compartments also. All dialogue ceased. The three Pathans, perched side by side on the upper berth, looked quietly down. The eyes of each passenger were wide with apprehension.

"Which railway station was that?" someone asked.

"That was Wazirabad."

The answer was followed by another reaction. The Pathans looked perceptibly relieved. But the Hindu and Sikh passengers grew more tense. One of the Pathans took a small snuffbox out of his waistcoat and sniffed it. The other Pathans followed suit. The old woman went on with her beads but now and then a hoarse whisper could be heard coming from her direction.

A deserted railway platform faced us when the train stopped at the next station. Not even a bird anywhere. A watercarrier, his waterbag on his back, came over to the train. He crossed the platform and began serving the passengers with water.

"Many people killed. Massacre, massacre," he said. It seemed as though in the midst of all that carnage he alone had come out to perform a good deed.

As the train moved out again people suddenly began pulling down the shutters over the windows of the carriage. Mingled with the rattle of wheels, the clatter of closing shutters must have been heard over a long distance.

The Babu suddenly got up from his seat and lay down on the floor. His face was still deathly pale. One of the Pathans, perched above, said mockingly: "What a thing to do! Are you a man or a woman? You are a disgrace to the very name

of man!" and laughed, and said something in Pushto. The Babu kept lying silently. All the other passengers too were silent. The air was heavy with fear.

"We won't let such an effeminate fellow sit in our compartment," the Pathan said. "Hey Babu, why don't you get down at the next station and squeeze into a ladies' compartment?"

The Babu stammered something in reply, and fell silent. But after a little while he quietly got up from the floor, and dusting his clothes went and sat down on his seat. His whole action seemed completely puzzling. Perhaps he was afraid that there might be pelting of stones on the train or a firing. Perhaps that was the reason why the shutters had been pulled down in all the compartments.

Nothing could be said with any sense of certainty. It may be that some passengers, for some reason or the other had pulled down a shutter and that others had followed suit without thinking.

The journey continued in an atmosphere of uncertainty. Night fell. The passengers sat silent and nervous. Now and then the speed of the train would suddenly slacken, when the passengers looked at one another with wide-open eyes. Sometimes it would come to a halt on its way, when the silence in the compartment would deepen. Only the Pathans sat as before, unruffled and relaxed. They too, however, had stopped chatting because there was none to take part in their conversation.

Gradually the Pathans began to doze off while the other passengers sat staring into space. The old woman, her head and face covered in the folds of her shawl, her legs pulled up on the seat, had dozed off too. On the upper berth, the Pathan who sat reclining against the wall, took the rosary out of his pocket and started counting the beads.

Outside, the light of the moon gave the countryside an eerie look of mystery. Sometimes one could see the glow of fires on the horizon. A city burning. Then the train would increase its speed and clatter through expanses of silent country, or slow down to an exhausted pace.

Suddenly the feeble-looking Babu peeped out of the window and shouted, "We have passed Harbanspura!" There was

intense agitation in his voice. The passengers were all taken aback by this outburst and turned round to stare at him.

"Eh, Babu, why are you shouting?" the Pathan with the rosary said, surprised. "Do you want to get down here? Shall I pull the chain?" He laughed jeeringly. It was obvious that he knew nothing about the significance of Harbanspura. The location and name of this town conveyed nothing to the Pathan.

The Babu made no attempt to explain anything. He just continued to shake his head as he looked out of the window.

Silence descended on the passengers of the compartment once again. The engine sounded its whistle and slowed its pace down immediately. A little later, a loud clicking sound was heard, perhaps the train had changed tracks. The Babu peeping out of the window looked towards the direction in which the train was advancing.

"We are nearing some town," he again shouted. "It is Amritsar!" He yelled at the top of his voice and suddenly stood up and, addressing the Pathan sitting on the upper berth, shouted, "You son of a bitch, come down!"

The Babu started yelling and swearing at the Pathan, using the foulest of language. The Pathan turned round and asked, "What is it, Babu? Did you say something to me?"

Seeing the Babu in such an agitated state of mind, the other passengers too picked their ears.

"Come down, *haramzade*. You dared kick a Hindu woman, you son of a—"

"Hey, control your tongue, Babu! You swine, don't swear or I'll pull your tongue!"

"You dare call me a swine!" the Babu shouted and jumped on to his seat. He was trembling from head to foot.

"No, no, no quarrelling here," the Sardar intervened, trying to pacify them. "This is not the place to fight. There isn't much of the journey left. Let it pass quietly."

"I'll break your head," the Babu shouted, shaking his fist at the Pathan. "Does the train belong to your father?"

"I didn't say anything. Everyone was pushing them out. I also did the same. This fellow here is abusing me. I shall pull out his tongue."

The old woman again spoke beseechingly, "Sit quietly, good folk. Have some sense. Think of what you are doing."

Her lips were fluttering like those of a spectre, and indistinct, hoarse whispers could only be heard from her mouth.

The Babu was still shouting, "You son of a bitch, you thought you would get away with it?"

The train steamed into the Amritsar railway station. The platform was crowded with people. As soon as the train stopped they rushed towards the compartments.

"How are things there? Where did the riot take place?" they asked anxiously.

This was the only topic they talked about. Everyone wanted to know where the riot had taken place. There were two or three hawkers, selling *puris* on the platform. The passengers crowded round them. Everyone had suddenly realised that he was very hungry and thirsty. Meanwhile two Pathans appeared outside our compartment and called out for their companions. A conversation in Pushto followed. I turned round to look at the Babu, but he was nowhere to be seen. Where had he gone? What was he up to'? The Pathans rolled up their beddings and left the compartment. Presumably they were going to sit in some other compartment. The division among the passengers that had earlier taken place inside the compartments was now taking place at the level of the entire train.

The passengers who had crowded round the hawkers began to disperse, and to return to their respective compartments. Just then my eyes fell on the Babu. He was threading his way through the crowd towards the compartment. His face was still very pale and on his forehead a tuft of hair was hanging loose. As he came near I noticed that he was carrying an iron rod in one of his hands. Where had he got that from? As he entered the compartment he furtively hid the rod behind his back, and as he sat down, he quickly pushed it under the seat. He then looked up towards the upper berth and, not finding the Pathans there, he grew agitated and began looking to right and left.

"They have run away, the bastards! Sons of bitches!"

He got up angrily and began shouting at the passengers: "Why did you let them go? You are all cowards! Impotent

people!" But the compartment was crowded with passengers and no one paid any attention to him.

The train lurched forward. The old passengers of the compartment had stuffed themselves with *puris* and drank enormous quantities of water; they looked contented because the train was now passing through an area where there was no danger to their life and property. The new entrants into the compartment were chatting noisily. Gradually the train settled down to an even pace and people began to doze. The Babu, wide awake, kept staring into space. Once or twice he asked me about the direction in which the Pathans had gone. He was still beside himself with anger.

In the rhythmical jolting of the train I too was overpowered by sleep. There wasn't enough room in the compartment to lie down. In the reclining posture in which I sat my head would fall, now to one side, now to the other. Sometimes I would wake up with a start and hear the loud snoring of the Sardar who had gone back to his old seat and had stretched himself full length on it. All the passengers were lying or reclining in such grotesque postures that one had the impression that the compartment was full of corpses. The Babu however sat erect, and now and then I found him peeping out of the window.

Every time the train stopped at a wayside station, the noise from the wheels would suddenly cease and a sort of desolate silence descend over everything. Sometimes a sound would be heard as of something falling on the platform or of a passenger getting down from a compartment, and I would sit up with a start.

Once when my sleep was broken, I vaguely noticed that the train was moving at a very slow pace. As I sat reclining, I peeped out of the window. Far away, in the rear of the train, the red lights of a railway signal were visible. Apparently the train had left some railway station but had not yet picked up speed.

Some stray, indistinct sounds fell on my ears. At some distance I noticed a dark shape. My sleep-laden eyes rested on it for some time but I made no effort to make out what it was. Inside the compartment it was dark, the light had been put out some time during the night while outside the day seemed to be

breaking.

I heard another sound, as of someone scraping the door of the compartment. I turned round. The door was closed. The sound was repeated. This time it was more distinct. Someone was knocking at the door with a stick. I looked out of the window. There was a man there; he had climbed up the two steps and was standing on the footboard and knocking away at the door with a stick. He wore drab, colourless clothes, and had a bundle hanging from his shoulder. I also noticed his thick black beard and the turban on his head. At some distance, a woman was running alongside the railway train. She was barefooted and had two bundles hanging from her shoulders. Due to the heavy load she was carrying, she was not able to run fast. The man on the footboard was again and again turning towards her and saying in a breathless voice: "Come on, come up, you too come up here!"

Once again there was the sound of knocking on the door.

"Open the door, please. For the sake of Allah, open the door."

The man was breathless.

"There is a woman with me. Open the door or we shall miss the train..."

Suddenly I saw the Babu get up from his seat and rush to the door.

"Who is it? What do you want? There is no room here. Go away."

The man outside again spoke imploringly: "For the sake of Allah, open the door, or we shall miss the train."

And, putting his hand through the open window, he began fumbling for the latch.

"There's no room here. Can't you hear? Get down, I am telling you," the Babu shouted, and the next instant flung open the door.

"Ya Allah!" the man exclaimed, heaving a deep sigh of relief.

At that very instant I saw the iron rod flash in the Babu's hand. He gave a stunning blow on the man's head. I was aghast seeing this; my legs trembled. It appeared to me as though the blow with the iron rod had no effect on the man, for both his hands were still clutching the door-handle. The

bundle hanging from his shoulder had, however, slipped down to his elbow.

Then suddenly two or three tiny streams of blood burst forth and flowed down his face from under his turban. In the faint light of dawn I noticed his open mouth and his glistening teeth. His eyes looked at the Babu, half open eyes which were slowly closing, as though they were trying to make out who his assailant was and for what offence he had taken such a revenge. Meanwhile the darkness had further lifted. His lips fluttered once again and between them his teeth glistened. He seemed to have smiled. But in reality his lips had only curled out of terror.

The woman running along the railway track was grumbling and cursing. She did not know what had happened. She was still under the impression that the weight of the bundle was preventing her husband from getting into the compartment, from standing firmly on the footboard. Running alongside the train, despite her own two bundles, she tried to help her husband by stretching her hand to press his foot to the board.

Then suddenly, the man's grip loosened on the doorhandle and he fell headlong on the ground, like a slashed tree. No sooner had he fallen than the woman stopped running, as though their journey had come to an end.

The Babu stood like a statue, near the open door of the compartment. He still held the iron rod in his hand. It looked as though he wanted to throw it away but did not have the strength to do so. He was not able to lift his hand, as it were. I was still breathing hard; I was afraid; and I continued staring at him from the dark corner near the window where I sat.

Then he stirred. Under some inexplicable impulse he took a short step forward and looked towards the rear of the train. The train had gathered speed. Far away, by the side of the railway track a dark heap lay huddled on the ground.

The Babu's body came into motion. With one jerk of the hand he flung out the rod, turned round and surveyed the compartment. All the passengers were sleeping. His eyes did not fall on me.

For a little while he stood in the doorway undecided. Then he shut the door. He looked intently at his clothes, examined his hands carefully to see if there was any blood on them, then

smelled them. Walking on tiptoe he came and sat down on his seat next to me.

The day broke. Clear, bright light shone on all sides. No one had pulled the chain to stop the train. The man's body lay miles behind. Outside, the morning breeze made gentle ripples across the ripening wheat.

The Sardar sat up, scratching his belly. The Babu, his hands behind his head, was gazing in front of him. Seeing the Babu facing him, the Sardar giggled and said, "You are a man with guts, I must say. You don't look strong, but you have real courage. The Pathans got scared and ran away from here. Had they continued sitting here you would certainly have smashed the head of one of them . . . "

The Babu smiled—a horrifying smile—and for long kept staring at the Sardar's face.

—Hindi short story
Translated by the Author

GULZAR AHMED

A Mango Leaf

A friend, Abu-Al-Hasan has just returned from Hongkong. A few days back I met him unexpectedly at a hotel. In the course of our conversation about Hongkong he said :

One day, while rambling through the market I happened to walk into a shop, beautifully displayed with imported goods. As I entered, a beautiful Chinese damsel welcomed me. She spoke in English and brought out a number of things to show me. Presently a handsome young man appeared and guessing from my features and attire, started talking to me in Urdu. I liked it immensely.

"Where have you come from?"

"From Karachi."

He was very pleased to hear my reply. His face was enlivened, his eyes turned bright and his lips started quivering. The young man held me by my arm and led me into a room in the corner of the shop. There, in front of an elegant table sat an elderly gentleman. He was engrossed in his work. No sooner did he see us, then he put his pen down, sat up straight and without asking a single question, welcomed us with a smile.

The young man who had brought me in said something, probably about me to the elderly gentleman. They were talking in Sindhi. On hearing the youngman's words, he became overjoyed. He rose from his chair and embraced me so tightly that for a moment I felt as though my ribs were cracking. He held my hand in both of his and asked me in Sindhi, "Have you come from Karachi?"

"Yes."

He smiled once again in the same manner as he heard me reply in Urdu and started talking to me in Urdu.

Much hospitality was shown to me despite my protests. He repeatedly asked me to elicit news about Sindh. His esteem for Sindh made me feel sorry for my own ignorance of that place. In such a state how could I provide him with

news about Hyderabad, Larkana, Sakka and Shikarpur! I was feeling ashamed of my poor knowledge.

You must be thinking that was all as regards to their hospitality. No, they sold me whatever I had purchased, at half price and in addition gave me a pocket transistor as a gift. Then the young man dropped me at my hotel in his magnificent car and said he would come again at five in the evening to pick me up.

I was apprehensive that it would be embarrassing for me if this young man should come again in the evening and take me to his friends who, too may ask me about Sindh. Hence, I decided to go out somewhere much before five.

It was hardly three-thirty and I had already started making preparations to go out. I locked my room at exactly 4 o'clock. Barely had I handed over the keys at the reception desk and stepped out, when the same magnificent red automobile pulled up close to me. I was alittle taken a back. The young man hopped out of the car, shook hands and drawing me towards the car said, "You are probably going out on some important work!"

"Not particularly, I was simply fed up sitting idle, so thought of going out for a stroll, "At this the young man chuckled and took me in his car to his friends. He introduced me to them and a little later we arrived at a store where some people were expectantly waiting for us.

I was introduced to all who were present in the room. The place was beautifully done-up. In one corner stood a flower vase on a table. I remembered seeing an identical one in Karachi. Finding my eyes glued to the vase, the owner of the car blurted, "This is a gift from my beloved country Sindh! It is made of wood which is etched. You will be surprised to know that a few days back, the multi-millionaire son of the proprietor of Ford Motor Company came to visit Hongkong. By chance he walked into our store and was fascinated by these flower vases. He inquired with much curiosity, "What is the country which excels in such novel things?" I replied, "This art is a heritage of my country Sindh which at present is a state in Pakistan." I also showed him a pallet and a cap with mirrorwork. He marvelled at the work-

manship and asked for their price. On learning that they were not for sale, he insisted on having them and brought out from his pocket a cheque for a thousand pounds and tossing it in front of me said, "Give me any one of them." I was unable to refuse him on account of his keenness and presented him the pallet he had taken a special fancy to, and also returned the cheque. He was thrilled.

That instant, walked in an elderly gentleman with a young man. Everybody stood up as a mark of respect for him. On entering it seemed as though he was looking for something from behind his thick spectacles. The young man who accompanied him led him by the hands and brought him to me. When we shook hands, the old gentleman held my hand firmly in both of his. As we perched ourselves of the sofa, he asked me very affectionately, "Have you ever been to Shikarpur?"

I answered hesitatingly, "No, I have never had the chance to go there."

My answer had made him placid for a while, but eventually he said, "Will you ever be going in that direction?"

Since I did not want to hurt him, I said, "I may go there some time."

On hearing this he pulled himself up and said emphatically, "Son, you must go there. Shikarpur is a very good town. You must taste the sweetmeats and icecream of that place. You will never forget them in your life. If you ask a *tonga*-driver at the station, he will take you to the tower of Lakhidar, where you will be able to have a glimpse of the beauty of that place." He was growing restless. It seemed as though he had lost his heart somewhere in Sindh. After a pause he resumed, "You have to go to Shikarpur. If not for yourself, then for my sake." He was trembling as he slid his hands into his pocket. He placed two hundred rupees worth dollars in my hands and said, "This is the return fare from my side."

"Yes, yes, uncle, I will definitely go. You keep the money; there is no need for it."

But he paid no heed to my request. The other gentlemen gestured that I accept the money. He continued, "When

you reach Lakhidar, you proceed towards the river Begari, whereupon you will come to a road at the corner of which you will find an old house—I do not know who lives there now...and yes...you will also find a mango tree in the courtyard of the house. It was tiny when I had planted it with my own hands...it must have grown big now...must be bearing mangoes...well, meet whoever lives there now. Then tell them the way we enjoy eating mangoes in our country, Sindh. Tell them, when Begari gets flooded, they should fill mangoes in new earthen pitchers and take them there. As soon as they reach the bridge, they will find on the left a dense reed tree. They should go and sit under the cool shade of the tree and fix the pitchers there in the wet mud in such a manner as to allow the clean water of the river to chill the mangoes as it flows further...then tell them, they should bathe in the river ...and while bathing should take out the mangoes one at a time from pitcher and eat them...only then they will be able to enjoy the actual taste of the mangoes."

The old man seemed elated. Suddenly he turned grave and said, "Son, you must do me a favour. I will bless you. When you visit that house, plead to the people living there for a fresh leaf of that mango tree. Then very carefully parcel it to me. I will collect the parcel here...this is the biggest favour I seek of you. It will be very kind of you. He spoke at length about Sindh and lightened the burden of his heart. Quite some time had passed. Since, I had to return to Karachi that very night, by the 10 o'clock flight, I took leave of them. All the gentlemen present embraced me affectionately and bid me farewell. Everyone said, "Give our regards to all the Sindhis, convey our respect to our country."

Having enjoyed the meeting with my Sindhi friends on the last day of me stay in Hongkong, I returned to the hotel with Sri Shyam, the owner of that red car. He was with me till the end. He helped me pack my baggage and do other necessary things. He also accompanied me to the airport. He embraced me very affectionately when the departure of the flight was announced. I could see his eyes brimming with tears. I asked "Shyam, if there is anything you want me to do, tell me, I shall do it very gladly."

He wiped his tears and said, "No, just pray that I may see my country Sindh some time."

Abu-al-Hasan sighed and lowering his head continued—It's the first time in my life I feel that after all how long are we going to consider ourselves foreigners! Foreigners, it is a wrong thought. It is madness, it is malice. No, no, not at all, we are no more foreigners. I am a Sindhi...Sindh is my country—at this thought I experienced a sense of pride.

The plane was flying amidst clouds. My gaze shifted to somewhere out of the window, Shyam was still there with tears in his eyes saying, "pray that I may see my country some time."

My heart felt heavy. I wished the plane could fly faster... I could get a glimpse of my country...could meet by Sindhi brothers. I was growing restless.

Sindhi Pakistani short story
Translated from Hindi by Neeta Mathur

KARTAR SINGH DUGGAL

A New Home

Kartar Singh Duggal is a prolific Punjabi writer who has contributed several significant novels and short stories on the theme of Partition. Presented here are three of his deeply moving short stories.

The Deputy Commissioner told us that houses for high officials had been set apart, as all spacious bungalows had been sealed as soon as the Muslim evacuees left. That is why, perhaps, I got the allotment order in about ten minutes.

Outside in the car were my mother, who had come from our village on the other side, a servant whose loyalty had stood the severest tests, a box or two and a bed or so, that we had succeeded in retrieving from Lahore.

My wife thanked the Deputy Commissioner and came out. We were told our bungalow was on a strip off the Mall.

A seal was on the main gate. We scanned it closely, snapped it open and went in.

The moment she set foot in the gallery, my mother drew a deep, heavy sigh which seemed steeped in her long and harrowing experiences.

Mother had never cherished a particular attachment for bungalows or a predilection for cars or a desire for a retinue of servants. She had lived a simple, peaceful life. Not all our persuasion could induce her to leave our native village. Even for occasional meetings, it was we who went to her.

When riots broke out she disregarded our letters urging her to come and stay with us. She saw no reason to desert her own hearth and home. And then the rioters one day walked into the village. I have it from our neighbours, my mother sat unconcerned in the courtyard of our *haveli*. The rioters were no strangers! They were none other than the peasants and farmers from the countryside around. They came to our house almost every day for whey. My mother distributed old woollen clothes among them every winter.

At last eight to ten hefty brutes crashed in, armed with man-size *lathis*. Jumma, the oil presser, was among them and Sharfu, the sweeper, Jehana, the professional jester, Meero, the ironsmith, Madu, the water carrier, Dulla the cobbler, and the three sons of Sayden, the tailor, from the nearby village.

"Chaudhrani, we offer salaams to you," they greeted my mother in the courtyard and entered the house giggling. Mother got up and, standing on the verandah, watched them take away the household effects. But as they were about to remove our nuptial bed, she remonstrated, "Jehana my son, this bed is from my daughter-in-law's dowry."

Jehana wouldn't hear.

"Shameless Jehana, don't take it away."

"Chaudhrani, let it be now," rejoined Jehana with a snigger, "don't be sentimental."

And my mother kept tugging at the mirror-set *newar* bed even as they carried it to the lane outside.

And as the sons of Sayden, the tailor, were straining to lift the heavy boxes in the dingy store-room, my mother ran towards them with a hurricane lamp : "Oh, you good-for-nothing! It is the season of snakes and scorpions. Take care lest you come to grief." She herself advised Meero, the ironsmith, to place the glassware in a separate basket and put metal vessels in a gunny bag. The fool was shoving all utensils into the same sack.

And thus the rioters entered the *haveli* laughing and left it exultant, salaaming my mother.

The same thing happened in all the other houses in the village. Not a single person received any injury, not one cry went up to the skies. The rioters kept pillaging the village all day long and swept it clean.

That evening the Hindus and Sikhs shifted to the neighbouring Muslim village and passed the night there.

Rawalpindi had been visited by disturbances long before Lahore. My mother, therefore, could not but join us at Lahore. Then the trouble started sizzling in Lahore also. In August it was ablaze. The residents of Model Town, we thought, were safe. Besides I was staying on in Pakistan at the behest of the Government of India. We argued, that Model Town at least

was beyond danger as only educated and cultured people lived there.

The 15th of August went by in a spate of blood. Panic lingered for a few days. But when putrescent cropses began to be removed from the streets, one longed for peace to return.

We, however, did not step out for full seven days. One evening I had almost decided to resume attendance in office from the next day, when a neighbouring friend brought me news that *goondas* of the vicinity were getting out of hand and that we had better leave the place within an hour.

I tried to expostulate with my Muslim friend, but with folded hands he entreated me to agree to his suggestion. He could not take so heavy a responsibility with the rabble breaking out of control. This friend of ours was a police official. Finding him so panicky, we stepped out of our bungalow leaving everything behind. We drove to the Pakistan border accompanied by a Muslim constable whom our friend had deputed to go with us.

My mother was stunned at the way we were forced to leave with just our clothes on, the Muslim constable guarding us with his gun against the menacing looks of those who stared at us.

My mother sat still throughout the journey. She saw endless lines of refugees trail along and uttered not a word.

Now as we broke the seal and entered a Muslim evacuee's house, my mother heaved a heavy sigh.

A walking-stick hung by the hat-stand—its handle rubbed black by greasy palms. Some seven hats occupied other pegs. On the floor lay a few letters slipped inside under the door; letters addressed to Khan Bahadur Sheikh Mirajuddin, Miss Zubeida, M.A. (student) and Begum Mirajuddin. Some of them were wedding invitations. One letter was a call for a peace committee meeting to be held at the Commissioner's residence. An anonymous letter addressed to Khan Bahadur threatened him to leave the place within twenty-four hours or bear the consequences.

Dust lay thick everywhere on the floor. Cobwebs quivered in the corners of the ceiling. Easy-chair lay set on the veran-

dah. A peg table stood by them. A white, dhobi washed table cloth covered it. On the table was a flower vase. It contained dry and withered stalks of flowers whose petals lay scattered around the vase, looking like dead and wilted pealings of onions.

In the thickly-carpeted drawing-room, sofa sets were lying undisturbed; the *Dawn* of August 15, 1947 lay open on a chair. The ceiling fan was running—it had been running day and night for the last ten days.

The table was set in the dining-room, with *shami kababs*, *korma*, *dopiaza*, *pilau* and other dishes. There was a plate of rice in front of the small, high, folding chair of a child; curd and a spoonful of rice lay uneaten in the quarter plate beside it. The timepiece on the mantel-piece had stopped at ten minutes past twelve. The radio set was burnt out and the wall had blackened a trifle with the smoke emitted by it.

A prayer mat was spread in the bedroom with a rosary over it. A corner of the prayer mat was turned up. Many gilded volumes of the Holy Quran were arranged on the shelf.

In the kitchen a *chappati* had burnt to a cinder on the baking disc. The vessel lying under the water tap had spilled over with the long and weary drippings. Five *lotas* of various shapes and metals nestled close to the wall.

In the servant's quarters a dog had dropped lifeless, his muzzle resting on the threshold. A *bulbul* lay dead in a cage suspended from the lemon tree.

Mother saw all this but did not speak.

We looked long at the Malta trees in the garden. My wife and I tried to work the Persian wheel. We then started counting the broken *lotas* on the chain and those that were missing. My wife said the Maltas would ripen in October. I held that they would be juicy enough to be eaten only in November. She kept on champing the parrot-nibbled guavas.

In the hen-coop hens had dropped eggs everywhere. And this fact helped my wife's initial disgust at the excreta-spattered courtyard to wear off.

As we returned to the bungalow after about an hour, the driver had swept it tidy. Smoke was curling up from the kitchen. The water was running out of the courtyard tap

vigorously.

My wife with an apron full of ladies fingers walked to the colourful string seat.

My sobbing mother stretched herself on a *charpoy* on the verandah.

And I switched on the radio set in the dining-room hoping no other part besides the transformer had been damaged.

Kulsum

What gift did the old man bring for him?

The restless footsteps of the young schoolmaster faded into silence inside the hut. On one side he saw a pile of pots and pans. On the other lay the oldman's little prayer-mat neatly spread with a disarranged rosary on it. He peered further inside. It was utterly dark. The sun had not set, but this portion of the hut was always benighted. The schoolmaster stared hard trying to piece the darkness.

What could it be that the old man brought for him from the city?

His eyes lit suddenly on a young girl standing against a pillar. Tall, fair with hair cascading down, as if a jasmine creeper had snaked up to the roof in the full glory of its youth. The school master stared.

Before the pillar, in a pool of darkness, was a charpoy. The linen was fresh and sparkling white.

"My name is Kulsum."

The schoolmaster's gaze flicked from the charpoy to the girls's face, to and from again and again. His eyes were going mad.

"My name is Kulsum. What's yours?" The lips opened like blossoming rose-buds.

The young schoolmaster sat limp on the charpoy. He felt as if he had been walking endlessly, all the twentyfive years of his young life.

He understood now why the old man had been so impatient. Why he had sent word so many times. Why he had wanted him to come straightaway. This was the 'gift' awaiting him. But he could not come any sooner. He had to wait till the school closed for the day.

The gift was fit to be swallowed as a whole. He would put his lips to hers and drain her into himself. The young schoolmaster felt his body stiffen all over. His eyes were aglaze

with strange inebriation.

This, perhaps, was the awaited independence. The subsstance of it. It was only yesterday that the country had won its freedom, the young schoolmaster repeated to himself. The songs and the slogans were still ringing in his ears. And today—only a day later—right before him, a Muslim houri!

Kulsum.

The gentlest touch would soil her.

"My name is Kulsum."

The young schoolmaster thought. Yesterday, in that very village, no Hindu or Sikh girl could come out of her home, even by day. Muslim goondas with their smutty hisses roamed the lanes. No one could deter the ruffians. They had ruled over the entire Punjab—hurling insults at the people in broad daylight, setting thugs on them, abducting their women in the open streets—no infamy was beyond them. No one could arraign a Muslim neighbour. That was yesterday.

And today, a Muslim fairy was standing before him, awaiting his pleasure. As though someone had snatched her out from behind the seven veils. A peerless pearl. The young schoolmaster's body ached with impatience. Gnawing hunger swam in his eyes. An obscene smile crept up his lips. He lunged at the girl and pulled her by the arm towards the charpoy. The girl did not move. The young schoolmaster pulled at her again. The girl remained stuck to the pillar.

"Speak to me first, please." she pleaded.

The young schoolmaster's mind was drained of thought, insane obduracy filled it. He pulled at her again and again.

"Marry me. Marry me first. How can I sit on a charpoy with a stranger?" the girl begged.

The young schoolmaster's face was dark with brute desire. Cruel hunger burned in his eyes. He did not speak a word. He pulled her time and again towards the charpoy.

"Don't do it. I beg of you. Don't do it. Marry me first. You are young. I was betrothed to a man of your age. Tall like you, broad-shouldered like you, teeth like yours, bright as pomegranate seeds. The rioters hacked him to pieces. My father and mother, my brother and all my relations have been killed. I don't know how I escaped. I alone. I ran on and

on like a mad person when this old man caught me and brought me here. On the way, he made me a promise. He said he would seek a mate for me. Marry me, please."

The schoolmaster could hear nothing. Every inch of his being was intoxicated. He pulled at her with all his strength. But the girl did not let go of the pillar. She stood her ground, steadfast.

"Marry me, I beg of you on my bended knee. Marry me first. Did ever a young and beautiful girl beg thus for love. Did ever a maid shed her shyness and talk in this fashion? Marry me. I shall be your slave for all time."

The young schoolmaster could hear nothing; he could see nothing. He jumped up in a rage of desire and pulled at the girl with both his hands. Helpness and at bay, the girl changed for a moment into a young lioness. She pushed him away from her with all her might. The young schoolmaster tripped and fell on the charpoy.

"I pray you," the girl said in a rush of tears. I beg of you. Marry me first, please. You are young. Marry me and I shall be the mother of your children. The mother of your pearly children. We shall have our own home and our courtyard . . ."

As the girl wept and begged, the young schoolmaster rose in towering frenzy and strode out of the hut.

The old man was sitting under the neem tree coiling strands of jute into rope. On hearing the young schoolmaster's story, he put down the spindle. "The bitch," he spat out, "she asks to be married." And he rushed into the hut, banging the door shut behind him.

Hardly had three minutes ticked by when the door opened. The old man came out knotting his *lungi.* "Go masterji, go in without fear," he said, picking up the water-jug that stood near the door. He walked briskly to the neem tree and started washing his hands.

Walking slowly, the young schoolmaster entered the dark hut. He espied the girl sitting on an edge of the charpoy with her back to him. Her silk trousers were rumpled. The dupatta had slipped from her head. A lock of dishevelled hair stuck to her cheek. Streams of sweat flowed down her neck. The

young schoolmaster sat by her side. The girl did not rise from the charpoy. The young schoolmaster put his hand on her shoulders. She sat motionless.

"Kulsum," the young schoolmaster called softly. The girl who had begged and pleaded three minutes ago said nothing.

A wave of darkness rose in the hut, perhaps it was night outside.

He Abducted Her

"My name is Rajkarni. And . . ."

It seemed as though the rest ot the sentence had got stuck in her gullet. She wanted to say: My name is Rajkarni. I am Chaudhuri Sohne Shah's daughter. Sohne Shah, *the* Chief Sohne Shah, who was known for his impartiality, his justice, his sense of fairplay. Sohne Shah, who was respected by all Hindus and Muslims alike. In whose eyes, being a Hindu or a Muslim made no difference. And she was his only child. His all. His only solace—his solitary comfort in lonely old age. Without her, how lonesome and lost he would be!

Like a wounded pigeon, his eyes pleaded for mercy.

The fierce-looking Pathan had stood her up on a stony rock and unmuzzled her face. How he looked at his prey. How youthful and full of bloom. He began to dance with joy—a dance of savage delight. And, as though drunk with desire, he stepped towards her. With a blood-stained hand he held up her chin, and asked: "What is your name?"

Said Shahzad Khan to himself: After all, my mother too was a Hindu. Hindu women are very steady, very sound and very wise. His father was always singing his mother's praises. And when, after bearing his father ten children, she had died, he was so disconsolate, as if his heart was broken. He gave up drinking. Never again went to the dancing girls. Lost all interest in shooting and hunting. Never again did he raise his voice.

Rajkarni sat on. She looked like a fairy. Soft and gentle. Like a vestal virgin.

Thought Shahzad Khan: The Pakistan which had given him a fairy like Rajkarni as a first gift, what a wonderful place it will be! And with all the silks and the gold he had with him in his bag as his loot, he could buy tens of beauties like Rajkarni.

For a long long while he just sat and gazed at Rajkarni.

Not once did she meet his eye. Not once did she as much as look at him—at Shahzad Khan, who was so young and so handsome.

Her eyes were glued to the rocky ground beneath her. They would fill with tears. And the tears fall to the ground like dew-drops at nightfall.

Shahzad Khan waited a long long time. Then with slow deliberation he sat down. Still he waited. And then he began to sing. He turned his back to Rajkarni.

Rajkarni heard his song. But the song was drowned by the echo in her head—constant, never-ending echo—of the cries of women and children, of the tat-tat-tat of the gunfire, of loud screams of the howling mob. Like a statue she stood still as though without life, carved out of stone.

Shahzad Khan got up, took her by the arm and led her to the stream below. And she went, like a lamb being led to the slaughter-house. And on the bank of the stream, on a grassy mound, soft as velvet, he made her sit down. Beside her, he sat down himself. The stream was burbling gently. He opened his bag and took out a shimmering garment of silk. And then another. Yet another. He went on taking them out and spread them all in front of her. Then the ornaments, glittering, their gold reflecting the light of the sun. He placed them too in a heap before her. And then he got up, and walked away slowly towards the stream below. She heard him splashing in the water. And he was singing.

Bangles, rings, brooches, necklaces—they were all there. But Rajkarni wanted none of them. Nor the soft silks in all the colours of the rainbow.

Rajkarni was musing. If only she could fly away and be with her father. But was he still alive? After that massacre. And her favourite playmate. I wonder what has become of her. Maybe she has also been impaled on a spear. Even if she could run away, where would she go? And would she really be able to run away? Perhaps she could drown herself by jumping into the stream. But the water seemed so shallow.

Maybe he is washing away the blood. The blood off his hand. The blood bespattered all over his face. And perhaps after he has washed himself clean his mind would also be

washed clean of all evil!

Where shall I be when the sun sets this evening on these rocks and the burbling stream yonder! And when the night falls. Oh, where shall I be? Will I ever again meet anyone I can talk to? Or laugh with? Now, I can't even cry!

As though there were no tears left in her eyes. She was drained of all tears. Her being seemed to be dried even of blood!

She sat on—till Shahzad Khan came back. He saw that she had neither washed nor put on any of the silken garments he had placed at her feet. He was indignant. What sort was she that she didn't even react to his kindness? Nor appreciate his bounteous gifts? True that he had brought her here by force. But so what? Haven't so many others like her been carried away by force? He had carried her with such gentleness. He could have torn her to pieces. He could have shot her like a dog. He could have squeezed her neck like that of a chicken.

And there he sat as all these thoughts flashed across his mind. He saw the cold calm water of the gently flowing stream. He felt the velvety softness of the grass under him. It was quite and peaceful. But his pent-up youth was ready to burst like a dam. And there she sat—a beautiful touch-me-not damsel—her eyes dug into the ground. His face flushed like a beetroot. His hands began to tremble. He wanted to shout at her but he felt as though his lips were sealed. So he sat—just looking—gazing at her.

No doubt he could carry her off without her consent. He could fling her into the well. He could push her down a cliff. Even drawn her in the stream. But how ever could he make her wash or get into those clothes? Or make her wear any of the ornaments? Of course, he could kill her.

Rajkarni said to herself: If only I could die.

Shahzad Khan was now seething with indignation. His anger was like a searing flame. His eyes were bloodshot. He saw the double-barrel gun lying in front. His hands clutched the cartridges in his belt.

But Rajkarni sat on, completely still. like a frightened dove, her eyes glued to the ground, terror-stricken, terrified,

shrinking.

And yonder was the stream, murmuring. And on the bank of the stream the lush green grass swaying gently in the breeze. It was quiet. The sky so clear.

Rajkarni sat. . .like a dew drop on a tree leaf.

Shahzad Khan's blood was again rising. Suddenly he felt as though the ground was slipping from under his feet. As though it was suddenly getting dark. There was darkness everywhere—darkness which was pitch black. . .total. And he was being submerged in this darkness. And he was being tossed about in a deadly storm. The stream had turned into a mighty river in flood. The earth was being split. The Heavens tore asunder. The stars tumbling down in a tremendous cascade. The mountains breaking into a myriad tiny fragments.

Shahzad Khan screamed a blood-curding scream. He started to run. He was fleeing. He knew not where. He was running like lightning. And he continued to run and run.

Rajkarni sat on. All alone. Benumbed. Perplexed. Flabbergasted. On one side—a heap of ornaments. On the other —silks. And still more silks. In front—the double-barrel gun. And the dagger. Smeared with blood.

And yonder below—the stream. Burbling quietly. Flowing gently. On and on. For ever and ever.

ONE ACT PLAY

CHANDRAGUPTA VIDYALANKAR

Tell them in Hindustan

CHARACTERS

The Old man : An old, respectable gentleman who left for India from West Punjab after the creation of Pakistan.

Nirmala : Young daughter of the old man.

Mukandi : Young son of the old man.

Driver, Constable, A.D.C.

In ACTS 3,4 and 5; Alexander, Andriokus, Skanda Gupta, Citizens, Ranjit Singh, Sardar Singh, Chirag Ali, Habibulla, A.D.C.

1

(A long caravan of cars and trucks is on the move. The din of old dilapidated cars and new cars can be heard. Occasionally, the cry of an infant could be heard. Half a minute later one of the truck drivers shouts loudly, "Pyarey Singh! Ye Pyarey Singh!"

For a moment, there is no answer. So the call is heard again, "Pyarey Singh, Ye Pyarey Singh! Have you fallen asleep?"

"No dear, can anyone sleep here?"

"How ominous is this night, Ye Pyarey Singh!"

This very moment a third voice is heard from the moving truck, "Constable, how far is Hindustan now?"

Constable : Hindustan is just across the Ravi river, and it will take about an hour from here to reach Ravi.

An old voice : Still an hour more to reach Ravi! Across the Ravi is our Hindustan! Our beloved Hindustan!

This play has been abridged for publication in this book

Constable : Yes, oldman, God willing, we will reach there after an hour.

An old voice : If God is willing? All right, brother, if God is willing then in the stillness of this night, just after an hour we will be able to shout out freely in our wearied voices—Jai Hind!

All the women, children and men who were sitting in the truck cry out in a faint voice, Jai Hind!

Truck Driver : Ye Pyarey Singh! Hope there isn't any dangerous spot left.

Pyarey Singh : Till we reach our destination, [there is danger everywhere, especially the village that lies three miles away from Ravi.

A Voice : How difficult it is to pass time! Fifty-five minutes of danger seem like fifty-five years.

Constable : If it is difficult to pass time, then sing a song. I will see who stops you from singing?

Pyarey Singh : Well said, Constable! Then, dear friends, is there anyone among you who can sing?

A Voice : Why don't we all sing a song together. Perhaps this will be our last song on the border of West Punjab in memory of our prosperous Punjab :

That's it! That's it?

A chorus. Men and women are singing together, the underlying idea of which is...the piece of land over which the sun and the moon move unexpectedly slower, that piece of land is our beloved Punjab, where there are golden fields, levelled grounds, lofty and green rose-wood trees and mango groves, and five long rivers wash the sacred feet of our motherland day and night.

Before the song could come to an end, the sound of firing is heard. The melody of the song is broken as suddenly as the unexpected snapping of a string of a musical instrument.

Along with the slogans 'Allah-o-Akbar' and 'Ya Ali! the firing could be heard from somewhere nearby. The sound of the moving truck stops and there could be heard contending slogans, 'Har-har Mahadev!' and 'Sat-shri Akal!'

The voices of the slogans, the thundering of the guns and the pathetic screaming of the women and children could be heard in unison.

(Curtain drop and Music)

2

A flustered voice : Father! Father!

A moment later : Father! Father!

A very feeble voice : Yes.

A girl : Brother, father has come around! Father! Father!

The Oldman : Dear Nirmal!, Dear Mukandi!

Nirmala : Yes father, we are all near you.

The Oldman : Where are we, dear.

Mukandi : Father, we are hiding in a field a little away from the main road.

The Oldman : Where is your brother Deshraj, dear?

Mukandi : Father, he sacrificed his life while protecting you.

The Oldman : Ah! to this extent! Oh Lord, for what offence have you punished me in my old age.

Mukandi : Father, muster courage.

The Oldman : Your mother was a pious soul, for she did not have to live to see this ominous day.

Mukandi : Father, how are you feeling now?

The Oldman : How far is Hindustan, dear?

Mukandi : We are not far from the border of Hindustan, father.

The Oldman : (In a swooning voice) Hindustan! Beloved Hindustan! Free Hindustan!

Nirmala : Father, Father!

The Oldman : Dear Nirmal! Dear Mukandi!

Nirmala : What is it father?

The Oldman· Dear, you all leave for Hindustan immediately in the quiet of the night.

Mukandi : Father, it is impossible. Without performing the last rites of our respected brother and without making proper arrangements to take you with us, we can't think of leaving.

The Oldman: I am all right now, my son. I will perform the last rites of my son with my own hands, here. You better leave for Hindustan with your sister, right now.

Mukandi: Father, this can never be done! I know you have been severely wounded. (In a heavy voice) Oh, father do you consider me to be so vile and ungrateful?

The Oldman: Son, a moment back you had asked me to be courageous. The truth is, we have no way out except to rely on our courage. (As if speaking to himself.) We have become homeless and pauper. We have been driven out of our Motherland, where we were born, where we had played, and with which we had a close affinity through out our lives. To-day on the threshold of our Motherland, in this dark night my beloved son was killed by the tyrants; your life has been threatened, the honour of my only daughter is in danger and at this ripe age of seventy one, I have endured this blow of a dagger. Oh my Lord! . . . Ah, if we do not face this courageously, then the word courage will lose its dignity!

Mukandi: Father, you are right! We shall certainly be bold.

The Oldman: That is why I command you to leave quietly for Hindustan in the stillness of the night, leaving me and the lifeless body of Deshraj over here.

Nirmala: Father, this is not gallantry! This will be an act of cowardice on our part. An unabated cowardliness.

The Oldman: No, my daughter! You are mistaken. How many can endure such an unbearable blow of life? I pray earnestly to God that he should never show such a day even to an enemy who may have to depart, leaving behind his brother's corpse and his living father' body in a jungle. But when we are faced with such a calamity, we shall have to face it with patience. If you remain alive after undergoing such harrowing experience, then your life itself will become the biggest yardstick of courage.

Nirmala: Why so much attachment with life, father! We can also sacrifice our lives like our brother.

The Oldman: I know it, my daughter. After all Deshraj was also a part of you.

Nirmala: Then why so much attachment with one's life?

The Oldman: (With a suggestion of smile) This life is not yours, Nirmal! It belongs to your country. You have to remain alive my daughter, because your country needs you.

Mukandi: Our country Father! We have been driven out of our country for good. It is you who had said just now that we have been excommunicated from our Motherland!

The Oldman: My son, I understand exactly how you feel! Now in the twilight of my life, I have been thrown out forcibly from the part of Motherland where Ihad spent the seventy one years of my life. The land which I had been seeing continuously for the past seventy one years, in the moon light in the afternoon, in the morning and in different forms in the evening, I shall no longer be able to do so. (The oldman is chocked with emotion but continues speaking, keeping his voice steady.) But my son Mukandi, our country is not limited only to that land where our forefathers and we were born. Our country is very large! Yet there is something which is still greater than the largeness of the country.

Nirmala: What is it, father?

The Oldman: We possess a treasure which we have to pass on to our descendants. You will have to live for the sake of this treasure, my son.

Mukandi: What is that treasure, father!

The Oldman: That treasure is in the form of a traditional responsibility. We are the watchmen of the border state of Hindustan. Our forefathers have always defended this border state. Today we have to defend our Hindustan from the border state, after us our descendants will have to defend Hindustan and then their descendants in turn will have to do the same meritorious work, and will have to live for this sacred work.

Nirmala: Father, but today that border state of our country has been snatched away from us. How can we defend it now?

The Oldman: (A little excited) You have raised a very painful and delicate matter, my daughter. It is true, we have abandoned our country's border state without putting up a fight. But this sacrifice is also for the good of the country. There is no doubt that by the dissection of the country we

have lost our hearth and home. But our country is still alive and we had to part with a portion of that very country.

Mukandi : (Soliloquy) Country, Motherland, Hindustan! Since when I have been dreaming about the freedom of the country. And today when our country has earned freedom, we have been robbed of all our possessions—hearth and home, brothers and friends, everything.

The Oldman: (With even more enthusiasm) Yes son, as always, even today we have made the maximum sacrifice to defend our country and for the freedom of our Motherland. As always, even today we have offered everything for the sake of the country and shall have to proffer on our Motherland whatever is left, like our brave ancestors.

Nirmala: How can we, father? Such a calamity has never occurred before.

The Oldman: I agree. From the stand point of abomination, whatever is happening now, has no precedent. Whatever it may be, our forefathers, watchmen of the border state had to face no less difficulties for protecting the country. Today, in this dark, historical night, I want to become immortal by telling you the tales of glorious deeds of our ancestors. (His voice starts quivering) The night is still long. It is my order that you leave me right here and proceed for India. But before leaving, hear the glorious tales of our ancestors from me. After that, you leave for Hindustan and tell the people of Hindustan that seventy-one years old father had made his greatest sacrifice for the sake of our dear Hindustan, so listen . . . .

(Music)

Note: Acts 3, 4 and 5 have been omitted as they have no direct bearing on the theme of India's partition. Invasions of Alexander and Huns have been described which give a glimpse of the glorious past of Hindostan.)

3

A very deep and incoroperal voice in musical atmosphere.

More than half of the dark night has passed. In the darkness of the night, with the help of the dim light of the stars,

two persons were solemnly advancing towards the Ravi river. One was a young man and the other a young woman. The voice of the dying father which was as sacred as the hymns of the Vedas was guiding them. Bound by this sacred instruction, these two persons had left behind in the blooming fields, their divine father who was breathing his last and the corpse of their heroic brother. The fields which once belonged to the prosperous Punjab were now a part of Pakistan.

They had lost everything—father, elder brother, relatives, friends, house, property, everything. Yet, a strange hope was driving them towards Hindustan. Their saintly father's voice was echoing in their ears. The profound voice of the old man, 'On reaching Hindustan, tell them that your father, at the age of seventy-one, had gladly sacrificed his life for the country. Tell them in Hindustan, tell them in Hindustan. We are the defenders of the border state tell them in Hindustan.

Hindi play
-Translated by Neeta Mathur

Khushwant Singh : Train to Pakistan

—M. Tarinayya

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is the poignant story of the tragedy of the Punjab happenings when people were seized by mad communal frenzy, and the disruption of life in the troubled days which followed the declaration of independence. The agony of the wounded soul of the novelist and the personal urgency which made the tragic experience articulate must be obvious even to the most casual reader of the novel. As one reads the powerful series of mass hysteria, one inevitably recalls D. H. Lawrence:

> ......insanity, especially mob-insanity, is the fearful danger that threatens our civilization......if the young do not watch out, they will find themselves, before so very many years are past, engulfed in a howling manifestation of mob-insanity terrifying to think of. It will be better to be dead than to live to see it. In the name of purity, piety, what a mass of disgusting insanity is spoken and written ! We shall have to fight the mob in order to keep sane and keep society sane."

It is exactly in what Lawrence says that the relevance and the justification for a novel like *Train to Pakistan* lies: It is a warning to the young that they must guard themselves against being engulfed by mob-insanity and a warning to the old that they must save the younger generation from the terrifying consequences of it. Khushwant Singh's achievement in *Train to Pakistan*, it seems to me, is remarkable for the extra-ordinary detachment (though it shows signs of failing him once or twice) one notices, as one begins to read the novel. I say this because, I believe, a lesser novelist who had had the mortifying personal experience of the agony of seeing his near and dear ones murdered in cold blood, or looted, would have been involved in indignation or self-pity; and no one who hadn't had the personal experience, unless he is an artist of the order of a Tolstoy, or

a Dostoevski or Shakespeare, could have written *Train to Pakistan*. As I write these lines I am reminded of a speech Nehru made in reply to critics (politicians) of the Nehru-Liaquat Agreement:

> May I remind the House......that if wel ook at this question objectively, Pakistan has not been the only source of trouble we have had to face? There has been plenty of trouble which originated in our own country. We will not be taking a balanced view of the situation unless we look at both sides of the picture......Not a single one of them (i.e. the amendments to Nehru-Liaquat Agreement) has even tried to consider what has happened on this side. They have looked at the sins and failings of others, not at our own. If we do that we would not only be acting wrongly, but we would also fail to understand the situation.

This, Nehru said, in 1950, six years before *Train to Pakistan* was published, and he, more than any politician—for he was an artist—looked at men and matters with the sensibility of an artist, and he 'suffered a hundred-fold more than men of less fine fibre'—could see that 'there was something afoot that was deeper' beneath the terrible happenings which policemen and soldiers could not solve. And when he saw or heard about them, grave doubts assailed him and 'the future of the country which was rising like a star, grew dim'. He knew that he was going to be judged by what his people did, but doubts came to his mind and it seemed to him

> that the noble edifice we were seeking to raise had been shaken to the foundations,

and therefore he pleaded for a change of heart of his own people and of those across the border:

> How could I, I wondered, affect the minds and hearts of millions of people who are my countrymen and also, if possible, those millions across the border?

Despite the detachment with which Khushwant Singh describes or enacts the terrible happenings, and despite the fact that the episodes are 'brutally realisitc' and 'vividly alive,' *Train to Pakistan* would not have been the work of art that it is, but for the strange story of love, actually sensitive and poignantly tender (and to me, at any rate, in its conception, more satisfying than Lawrence's *St. Mawr* or 'The Princess'), interwoven with remarkable technical skill—the story of the love of Jugga the Sikh peasant and Nooro the Muslim weaver's daughter—into the narration. I said 'a strange story of love' for it has all the unpredictableness of life, and the novelist, as Yeats had said, makes 'Death.........the servant of life, because that is the only answer to a living world bent upon death', and hence has the authenticity of genuine inspiration, driving home the message—for it has one—that an intensely human problem can be solved only by change of heart, by an essentially moral and spiritual approach to it, and not by politicians, policemen or soldiers.

The scene of action of *Train to Pakistan* is Mano Majra. Mano Majra is not any place in India, but a village in the Punjab, half a mile away from the river Sutlej, a 'tiny place' in the 'remote reaches of the frontier' one of the few 'oases of peace' untroubled by the convulsions of killing, looting, abduction, rape that shook the Punjab. Mano Majra was a living example of Hindu-Muslim common ground. It had only three brick buildings, one of which was the home of Lala Ram Lal, the Hindu Money-lender. The other two are the Sikh temple and the Mosque, the three buildings enclosing a triangular common ground with a large peepul tree in the middle. The rest of the village is one of flat-roofed mud huts and low walled courtyards which front on narrow lanes. At the western end of the village is a pond ringed by keekar trees and about a mile north of the village, the river Sutlej is 'spanned by a magnificent bridge its eighteen enormous spans sweep like waves from pier to pier'. It is by means of such concrete particulars that the place and its inhabitants, the Hindus, Muslims, the Muslim Mullah tall, and lean, with a grave beard, who despite his sixty years walked erect, and whom the villagers out of respect and love, called 'Chacha Imam', Bhai Meet Singh—short, fat, hairy, often untidy·—, his long hair tied in a knot held by a wooden comb,

the sweepers 'whose religion is uncertain', the lonely station master and his only assistant, the occasional passenger that gets on or off the train, the women sitting after their midday meal rubbing clarified butter into each other's hair, discussing births, marriages and deaths, are brought to life, reminding us of the remarkable fidelity and attention to detail with which Raja Rao evokes Kanthapura in the novel of that name. But more important perhaps, from the point of view of the theme of the novel, is the seemingly unimportant, but very significant detail the novelist with effortless ease slips in:

> ......there is one object that all Mano-Majrans—even Lala Ram Lal—venerate. This is the three foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keekar tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the *deo* to which all the villagers—Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or pseudo-Christian—repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing.

The novelist seems to suggest that somewhere, deep in their psyche, the people of the village felt the human folly of erecting communal barriers. It was as though the thousands of years of race-memories had not been obliterated, and in times of stress strain, despite the external trappings of religion, their blood was conscious, of what Gandhiji had once remarked: "Every Muslim will have a Hindu name if he goes back far enough in his family history. Every Muslim is merely a Hindu who has accepted Islam". It was as though this superstition of worshipping the 'slab of sandstone' which made their life tolerable inspite of the grinding poverty, cancelled out that other terrible superstition that has brought untold misery and suffering to millions of innocent men, women and children in India and Pakistan. Mano Majra, to the novelist is symbolically the one bright spot amidst the encircling gloom, and he evokes the harmony that prevailed as skillfully, as he had evoked the life in the village, reminding us of one of Arnold Toynbee's most perceptive comments on the Sikh religion :

> The Sikh religion might be described, not inaccurately as a vision of......Hindu-Muslim common-ground.

The novelist tells us that before day-break, as the mail train which does not stop at Mano Majra rushes through on its way to Lahore and approaches the bridge he blows two long blasts of whistles, and the Mullah at the Mosque knows it is time for prayer. He has a quick wash, stands facing west towards Mecca and with his fingers in his ears cries in sonorous tones "Alla-ho-Akbar". The priest in the Sikh temple who lies in bed till the Mullah has called, gets up, draws a bucket of water from the well in the temple court-yard, pours it over himself, and intones a prayer. It would look as though the Sikh priest could not do without the Mullah offering his prayers. And the Gurdwara was invariably the place for Muslims and Sikhs to meet and discuss common problems of the village even as the peepul tree in the triangular common ground in front of the temple *and* the mosque proclaiming the Upanishadic oneness of creation, and that contraries make for progress, gave them shelter without distinction: Sikh or Muslim. In recreating Mano Majra for the reader adding detail after detail but carefully selected, the novelist, it seems to me, was unconsciously aware of the Gurus's words:

> He is in the temple as He is in the Mosque:
> He is in Hindu worship as He is in Muslim prayer;
> Hindus and Muslims are one.

And this unity was a living acutality in the way the Sikhs made their Chacha's sorrows their own, for, without this, unity is meaningless. When the Muslim weaver's wife and only son died within a few days of each other, and his eyesight which was already bad became worse and he was unable to work his loom, reduced to beggary with a baby girl Nooran, the village folk brought him 'small offerings' of flour, vegetables, food and cast-off clothes, which kept him and his clothes. There was no feeling whatever of their *giving* and his receiving; it was an 'offering' for they respected him as much as they loved him. And Chacha Imam must do something for them. He wrote

verses from the Koran for folk to wear as charms or for the sick to swallow as medicine. And he gave them his inexhaustible treasure of anecdotes, jokes, proverbs, the peasants loved to hear. It is as though the people, 'doing their little jobs' and living in a world of their own (dull and superstitious though it might seem to sophisticated "foreign returned" Indians, as it in fact does to that hyprocrite and snob of a 'social worker'—social worker indeed he was! Comrade Iqbal of the novel) somehow wished that politicians would keep themselves out and not disturb the peace of the village, the novelist tells us: the people were not aware that the British had left and the country was divided into Pakistan and Hindustan. One doubted whether anyone had ever heard of Jinnah; but some of them knew Gandhi:

> "If we have no faith in God then we are like animals" (Chacha Imam tells the social worker who, he was quick to point out, was a nihilist)

> "All the world respects a religious man. Look at Gandhi! I hear he reads the Koran Shariff and the Unjeel along his Vedas and Shastras......"

Gandhi the man of God impressed the old man; but freedom meant little or nothing to them as the lambardar of the village tells Iqbal:

> "Freedom must be a good thing. But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes. ?"

And the Muslim Mullah confirming him adds:

> "Freedom is for the educated......We were slaves of the English and now we will be slaves of the educated Indians—or the Pakistanis."

An analysis which startled us, as much as it startled that pseudo-intellectual Iqbal, and which should sting to the

quick all those intellectuals' and educated Indians who have betrayed the country.

It was into this village, for the novelist a symbol of hope of human sanity and survival, (perhaps it literally was) that the dreadful news of the arrival of a train-load of dead bodies of Sikhs and Hindus at Mano Majra railway station slowly trickles in, despite the Deputy Magistrate Hukum Chand trying to suppress it. The Sikhs and Muslims met in the Gurdwara dazed and stunned; they had little to say and all that they could do was invoke the blessings of Allah and the Guru. It is by means of scenes such as this one and the ones I have already mentioned briefly—scenes which are intensely human expressing the utter helplessness of the people and their belief that Allah and the Guru might somehow dispel the darkness that was enevloping them that Khushwant Singh touches the depths of our hearts and intensifies the terrible impact of the suddenness with which the barriers which the Sikh Gurus had laboured to cast down had been re-created in this village which recalls for the reader with a sense of history the tragedy of Jallianwallah Bagh where the blood of Hindus and Muslims had mingled in the fight for freedom.

It is against this back-ground that the reader of *Train to Pakistan* has to look at the train-loads of dead bodies of Hindus and Sikhs which were burnt as if they were rubbish heaps, (even for that the villagers had to provide the kerosene and firewood for which money was promised but never given and the dazed villagers cared little for the trash) the thousand skulls scattered over the field, the Sikhs retaliating and attacking the Muslim refugee train, sending it across the border with a thousand corpses, 'Gift to Pakistan' written on the engine, (neither the Sikhs nor Muslims realising that there was no heroism in murdering defenceless men and women and butchering children or molesting women); the second train-load of men, women and children from Pakistan—all buried in a trench (for there was no more oil to spare and the wood was damp because of the rain) dug out by the monster of a bulldozer, 'eating, chewing up the earth, casting it aside,' and then 'blenching and vomitting it out;' the river Sutlej whose lifegiving waters had nourished both Muslims and Hindus defiled by human bodies—'stabbed and

speared and clubbed'—thrown into it; the cruel fate of Sundari who had been married only four days and both her arms covered with red lacquer bangles (indication that she had not yet found the consummation of her marriage) helplessly watching the private parts of her husband Mansa Ram cut and placed in her hands (one has only to imagine what was) done to her later, for it can't bear telling); trains carrying five hundred men, women and children in compartments meant to carry '40 sitting, 12 sleeping—the temperature 115° in the shade—no—shade—not a shrub within miles—only the sun and the sand and no water; the father shooting his baby (all bone) and his wife (whose breasts had dried up), unable to bear the agony of their suffering, and trying to kill himself, the revolver misfiring, and the horror of having to live after that; and all the untold tales of gruesome murders that came trickling across the border from Amritsar, Lahore, Gujranwala, and a host of other places—to *feel* the magnitude of the violence that made the Punjab a waste land. It must have seemed to the novelist that the sun and the moon dis-approved of man flouting his Creator and turning monster, and he therefore says:

> The sun goes on, day after day, from east to west scorching relentlessly. The earth cracks up and deep fissures open their gaping mouths asking for water; but there is no water only the shimmering haze at noon making mirage lakes of quick silver.

and,

> The moon looked tired and dissipated. It flooded the plain with a weary pale light in which everything was blurred.

It is as if to agitate the troubled hearts of the villagers and break whatever resistance there was left that the Deputy Commissioner Hukum Chand (who had read up to the seventh class and who, by blacking the boots of British officers had shot up) with the weight of a century and a half of working of the Penal Code he could not easily shake away, wanting to effect 'peaceful evacuation of Muslims', regardless of the means he adopted, spread rumours that a gang of Muslim dacoits had murdered

the Hindu money-lender and that a certain Mohammad Iqbal was spying in the village. Added to this was the arrival in the village of a number of refugees who had crossed the river and the news that larger numbers who had lost their mothers, sisters, their near and dear ones were most likely to arrive. The meeting which was held at the lambardar's house and the entire situation in which the simple Punjabi peasant caught in the dilemma out of which he found no solution, the temperatures running high, the innate humanity of the Punjabi peasant asserting itself, the utter helplessness of the Muslims, the pathetic sight that Chacha Imam was, the final decision to send the Muslims away to the refugee camp (which in the circumstances seemed to them the only sensible solution) hoping they could return after the trouble had subsided, not knowing that the Pakistani military officer was going to pack them off by train to Pakistan, the parting of the Muslims and the looting of their scanty belongings by refugees and dacoits that follows, the callousness of the military and police, sometimes divided on communal basis, are among the most moving and intensely dramatic aspects of the novel and I am afraid I have done the novelist injustice by summarising the events. And the sensitive reader cannot fail to see the remarkable subtlety with which Khushwant Singh has used a foreign (?) language to convey the compulsions of the inner psyche and the sensibility of the Punjabi peasant caught in a situation he had not known for centuries—a subtlety which only a few native speakers of English are capable of. As one reads these agonizing fifteen or so pages, one can't help seeing how paltry, how mean and mad, the intrigues of those who created the two-nation theory are. And as the novelist sees Mano Majra's cup of sorrow full, he must have (as the reader does) wondered: Was it for nothing that the Granth Sahib—the Sacred book of the Sikhs—enjoins that the Sikh must carry a Kirpan, the symbol of strength? Wasn't there a single Sikh in the village who could redeem the pledge?

It has been said that the man who has no sense of humour is 'the greatest bore on God's earth.' My analysis of *Train to Pakistan* has perhaps given the impression that it is one continuous unrelieved tragedy. The Punjabis love fun, and have an

inexhaustible capacity for laughter. They relish making jokes and are quick to perceive insincerity and pretentiousness. Their popular proverbs and aphorisms are classic examples of the genial wisdom of a people who have not lost contact with the soil that nourishes them. And the novelist being a Punjabi himself could not have ignored this aspect of the nature of his people.

Iqbal's encounter with the lambardar, Bhai Meet Singh, and Imam Baksh, and later with the policemen who come to arrest him, and the way the novelist mercilessly exposes Iqbal, who, for him is typical of all politicians and political agitators, and who seek to hide their weakness, falsehood, blacksliding, hyprocrisy, their double—do and double—think by aggressive and bombastic speech-making; the elaborate arrangements the police make to arrest Jugga knowing fully well that he had not committed the crime, Jugga's conversation with Iqbal in the prison cell; the working of the so-called 'law-and-order' system, the officialism, the boot-licking, the cringing and crouching of subordinate officers, the conversation between Jugga and the cart-driver, the way the police sub-inspector tries to discover whether Iqbal was a Muslim or a Hindu, the Punjabi peasant's reminiscences of his days in the British army and his comparison of Indian and British military officers to the disadvantage of the former while Iqbal was fretting and fuming against the British—all these make us laugh. But the incidents are not there just to evoke laughter; they are part of the total organisation of the novel, and one sometimes sees an undercurrent of irony, satire, and sarcasm, and sometimes touches revealing the innate simplicity, hospitableness, and genial temperament of the peasants.

Time, perhaps, I said something about the love story. What strikes the perceptive reader about it is the way human love breaking the barriers man in his ignorance has erected—barriers of caste, sub-caste, sub-sub-caste, religion, and nationality—responds to the subtle vibrations of the heart and seeks fulfillment; and the novelist's faith in the redeeming power of love. When one first hears of Jugga and Nooro from the flippant, rather scandalous talk of Malli and his gang of dacoits, one wouldn't believe that it was the poor Muslim weaver's daughter who had

weaned Jugga away from evil company and crime, and accomplished with her 'magic eye' what the Punjab police and their queer methods of torture could not—Jugga who was the despair of the police, a terror even to dacoits—'a budmash' as the police called him. And who would have thought that his love, phoenix-like was consuming him?

It is as though the novelist wanted his lovers to get away from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, from the pettiness and ugliness that he found around that he takes them to the sands of the Sutlej, the river that nourished them quietly flowing by, and the myriad stars in the Milky Way shining, waiting to bless the consummation of their love—love which in its elemental purity transcended the petty conventions of morality. As Nooro arrives playfully closes Jugga's eyes and asks: 'Guess who?'

> A meteor shot across the Milky way, trailing a silver path down the blue black sky,

as if to light the path of their love, and when the moment of the fulfilment of the ecstacy of their love arrived,

> The stars above went into a mad whirl and as they released their embraces, 'came to their places, like a merry-go-round coming to a stop' and seemed 'censorious', as though they suddenly realised that society would not tolerate them. And it indeed didn't.

Malli and his dacoit gang were murdering the coward of a money-lender who abandoning his wife, mother and his pretty little child had hid himself under a charpoy in the room on the roof; and the Deputy Magistrate, the conscience keeper of the people was slacking his thirst for sex with a sixteen, seventeen year old Muslim girl who reminded him of a daughter of his, drowning his conscience in drink after drink of whisky. The novelist's disgust, indignation and horror is all there, in that one expression: that the girl reminded him of his daughter, and that he drowned his conscience in whisky.

Jugga is arrested on suspicion—he *was* a budmash and *must* be a budmash and had disobeyed police orders not to go out of

his house after sun set—though there was no evidence of any sort. The Pakistan military officers were going to pack off all Muslims, Chacha Imam and Nooro, to Pakistan by train. Political agitators whose philosophy is 'tooth for tooth and eye for eye' arrive and make elaborate plans to sabotage the train and massacre the Muslims.

Nooro we learn is with Jugga's child. And the novelist bestows all his sympathy on her and creates two of the most moving scenes in the novel: the first when her father comes and tells her that they must leave Mano Majra, astonishment and fear beating upon her heart, and the second when Nooro hoping that Jugga must have been released since Malli who was arres ted in connection with the Murder is released, goes to Jugga's house in the middle of the night and meets his mother. In just a couple of pages, the reactions of the old woman—at first indifferent, then angry that she had spoiled her son, softening a little when she sees Nooro crying but struggling between contrary feelings, admonishing Nooro, and finally giving her the hope that Jugga must after all marry her, for she had her son's baby in her womb—are conveyed with all the skill of a dramatic artist.

Jugga is released late in the evening of the day the train was to leave. Hoping that his Nooro must be somewhere in the village—may be she is hiding in the fields, may be his mother has sheltered her—he disappears into the village.

"If we have no faith in God then we are like animals", that was what Chacha Imam had said. The novelist seems to have remembered and he himself must have felt that in the waste land that surrounded him, there was greater need for a burning faith in God, though all the mass-insanity was created in the name of religion. And his hero too needed 'communion with the Word of the Guru' now more than ever. His hope is now in his hero. He must redeem the Sikh religion; he must redeem Mano Majra which had failed him; he must redeem the Kirpan which is no longer the symbol of strength. Jugga therefore ran to the Gurdwara.

> "Bhai", he whispered, "I want the Guru's word. Will you read me a verse?"

Meet Singh grumbled. He had put the Granth Sahib to rest and in his superstition, believed, that the scripture must not be disturbed. He however read him Guru Nanak's morning prayer, as Jugga waved the fly whisk. A little later, the novelist tells us, in the breath-taking paragraphs how Jugga—the Word of the Guru had given him all the courage he needed—began hacking and slashing at the rope tied across the bridge to sabotage the Muslim refugee train in which Nooro was, and that he was fired at by the terrorist political agitators. The last two sentences of the novel read:

> The rope snapped in the centre............The train went over him .... went on to Pakistan.

Jugga fulfilled his creator's hopes. And if we look at the manner of his death in the context of the prayer the novelist had made the priest read to Jugga, it would appear that this illiterate peasant was God's chosen instrument, who by his unswerving faith in God, and his consuming passion for the girl he loved, made death the servant of life and redeemed the Sikh and the Hindu.

As we finish reading the novel, we are left with one overpowering feeling:

> What else is wisdom? What of man's endeavour?.........
> so lovely so great?
> To stand free from fear set free.........

and we ask ourselves: Will the wise heart from that last giddy hour fold over the world its healing wings? What is going to happen to Nooro and Jugga's baby?—questions which must have agitated the novelist's heart as much as they do ours.

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